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The Hawks and Wolves of New York;



"I'VE COME HERE FOR THE GAL AND I AM GOING TO HAVE HER."

OR, Roland Reade's Ruse.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN,
AUTHOR OF "FRESH OF 'FRISCO," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE BEACH AT LONG BRANCH.

It is of Long Branch that we write, "Long Branch-by-the-Sea," not the village proper, which is a mile or so inland, but of the hotel and cottage city, clustering by the side of the sad sea waves.

It was in early spring and the season had not yet opened; the summer visitors had not made their appearance.

It was a fine night, air balmy and

pleasant, and with just breeze enough stirring to make one feel comfortable, for the day had been quite warm.

The boulevard along the beach cliff, the grand ocean drive, the one great attraction of the "Branch," was almost deserted, for the hour of nine had come, and despite the pleasantness of the night, nearly all the inmates of the houses along the street were preparing to retire.

The drive runs by the side of the beach from Seabright to the West End Hotel, there makes an abrupt turn inland, for a few hundred yards, and then, though turning again to its original course, is separated from the beach by a line of cottage estates.

Right opposite to the West End Hotel, on the top of the bluff, is a little, carefully-tended lawn where the open summer-houses of the hotel are placed, and a wooden stairway leads to the bathing-booths below.

But at the time of which we write neither summer-houses nor bathing-booths were in place, for the first, very much the worse for wear after the winter campaign, were over on their sides against the fence, and the bathing-cabins, all taken apart, were piled up in heaps by the side of the summer-houses.

The only thing in readiness for the opening season was the weather-beaten wooden stairway.

And upon this stairway, seated about half-way down it, so as to be concealed from the view of any one passing along the drive above, was a young man, gazing with a sober face out upon the moonlit waste of waters, and puffing listlessly at a cigar. He was of medium height and well-built; had regular features, deep blue eyes and golden, crispy curling brown hair; a small full beard concealed his chin, but his upper lip was cleanly shaven. This gave rather an odd appearance to the handsome face, particularly as the hair had been allowed to grow long after the careless artist fashion.

He was dressed poorly; all his attire from his boots to his hat gave evident signs of long wear, and there was an anxious look upon his face which plainly told of inward care.

"Why don't she come?" he muttered, drawing forth a little silver watch and consulting it. "It is after time, and I want to get out of this by that late train to-night; the place is getting too deuced hot too hold me. I mustn't wait until to-morrow. If I miss that train to-night, I'll foot it up to Seabright, cross the bridge to the Highlands and take the New York freight-boat which goes up the first thing in the morning. I think that will give my inquiring friends the slip in the most ingenious manner. But I must have a parting word with my sweet girl."

And as he came to this point in his soliloquy, the sound of footsteps reached his ears—short, and sharp—a woman's footsteps evidently.

The young man rose and tossed away his cigar, and his face lit up so that he looked like another person.

A woman appeared at the top of the stairway, and at once descended, smilingly, to greet the watcher.

She was eighteen, apparently, not little nor yet large in stature, and beautifully formed; a round, English-like face, rosy with the hues of health, lit up by great brown eyes—thoughtful eyes and with rather a sad expression. Her hair was blue-black in color, and grew in profusion. She was dressed plainly, poorly in fact, for, although everything she wore was tastefully and becomingly made, yet the stuff was of the commonest and cheapest material.

"You are late," he said, as she descended to his side; and he passed his arm around her as he spoke, imprinting a loving kiss upon her not unwilling lips.

"Yes, I have a long way to come, you know, and I could not leave home until after dark without exciting suspicion."

"Ah, my darling, the time will come, and soon, too, I hope, when you will be with me all the time."

Slowly they descended the steps until they reached the beach. Above shone the bright moon, along the shore the surf poured in with its restless roar; his arm was around her waist, her head pillowed upon his bosom, while her eyes were fixed upon his face, full of love.

"Oh, I hope so," she replied, in fervent accents. "The life I lead now is misery. All is so dark and dreary; the only consolation I have is to think of you."

"Bear it for awhile, the end will soon come."

"I will strive to do my best, but it is a dreadful life; all that keeps me up are these blissful secret meetings with you. If it was not for the courage that you give me—the remembrance of your caresses, I feel that I should never be able to endure it. I should go mad, I am sure I should."

A shade passed over the young man's face, and involuntarily his arms tightened around her and drew her still closer to him.

"My own dear Helen, if I could only express to you how happy your words make me, and yet they render me miserable, too, for cruel fortune decrees that for a time we must separate."

"Separate!" and the cry came like a wail of anguish straight from the young girl's heart.

"Yes; Heaven knows I would spare you this blow if I could," he said, hurriedly, evidently much troubled, "but it is impossible, and we must bow to the will of fate. Trust me, have confidence in me, and believe that all will be well. You do trust me, do you not?"

"Can you ask that question?" she replied, a little touch of reproach in her tones. "Have I not given you the best proof of it in the world? You have my love, all that I can give, and yet you are almost a stranger to me."

"Helen, dear, I am almost a stranger to all the world. You know as much of me as any one does, with two or three exceptions. I am called Roland Reade, a Bohemian, a man who makes his living by his wits, a Jack-of-all-trades, and a master of none, a rolling stone who thus far has gone through the world gathering no moss; in a happy, blissful hour, I came here to the side of old ocean and encountered you, a Jersey lily blooming amid these barren sands, flourishing in the shadow of the stunted pines; the moment I saw you I felt conscious that you would change all my future life. I sought to win the priceless treasure of your love, and I succeeded. I have lingered in one long dream of happiness, but now the hour of awakening has come and I cannot linger longer. The nets of adversity are gathering around me, and I must away ere I am caught in the toils of the spoiler."

"You are in danger?" and she clung still more tightly to him.

"I am, but do not press me for an explanation, for I am so situated that I cannot tell you all that I would under other circumstances. All I ask is for you to trust and love me—believe me true! believe me when I say that I love you more than all the world besides, and that as soon as I can I will return and make you mine, openly before all the world."

"And this is our last meeting, then?" the girl gasped, her eyes filled with tears.

"For the present, yes; but do not weep; I will come again to you as soon as I can."

"But I may not be here; my position is growing so absolutely unbearable that at any moment I may have to run away to seek my fortune out in the cold, cruel world."

"Yes, I remember you told me something of this on our last meeting, but I entreat you not to go if you can possibly avoid it; but in case you do have to leave home, you will go to New York, I presume?"

"Yes."

"I have prepared this letter for you; do not open it until you arrive in the city on any account," and he put a sealed envelope in her hand. "In it you will find instructions. And now, one farewell kiss and then good-by. No matter what happens—no matter how much appearances may be against me, believe and trust me; will you?"

"Ay, though all the world may turn against you," she cried, impulsively.

A fond embrace, lips to lips in lover's passionate kisses and they parted—he hurrying along the beach, for he thought that road would be safer than to trust to the avenue, and she sinking down in a flood of tears at the foot of the stairway, the dreadful thought upon her that she might never see him again.

CHAPTER II.

A DREADFUL DISCOVERY.

"GONE, gone, perhaps forever!" she murmured, her tears falling thick and fast.

But the more violent the grief the quicker it is over, and after a few minutes the girl recovered her composure, wiped away the tear-drops and with slow steps, mournful reflections and a heavy heart she reascended the stairway.

Straight along the avenue she went, past the West End Hotel, and around the turn until she came to Cedar avenue into which she turned, her back upon the sea, and proceeded up the deserted road.

There were signs of life along the avenue, though, if the girl was the only one who seemed to be abroad.

Hollywood, the great Hoey Mansion, was ablaze with light and in the "actors' quarter," as it is termed, the inmates of Mary Anderson's, Chanfrau's, Johnny Albaugh's, Maggie Mitchell's and Manager Henderson's cottages were all up.

A sigh came from the sweet lips of the girl as she trudged past the abodes of these Thespian celebrities and peering in through the windows saw the merry players enjoying the delights of home after their long professional tours.

The girl was a born aristocrat, and when she compared the comforts of the life, of which she now caught a glimpse, with the miserable existence which she was compelled to endure, her heart fairly grew sick within her.

She hurried forward, for the sight of these happy people only made her more miserable; and as she trod along the weary road all the simple events of her life came back to her.

One unceasing round of toil that life had been. Ever since she could remember she had dwelt with old Daddy Waybit, on a little farm in the "pines," a couple of miles from Branchburg—a little sandy patch, right in the middle of the forest of scrubby pines, ten or twelve acres in

extent, with a small story-and-a-half farm-house and a dilapidated little barn.

The neighbors were all negroes, who occupied similar patches reclaimed from the pines, and who managed to get a living by raising "truck" and fruit, principally berries.

Waybit was an eccentric sort of a man, who had not changed a particle in all the years the girl had known him. Her earliest remembrances of him was as a misshapen, cross old man, very much given to drink, and who seldom went to bed sober if he could procure liquor. He was, though, a person of education, head and shoulders above any of the neighboring country people, despite his vices and slovenly ways.

No Jerseyman was Waybit. He had bought the miserable little farm some fourteen years ago, coming from no one knew where, accompanied by an old woman, whom he called his wife, and the girl, then a child of four years, whom all supposed to be his daughter. He was a mystery to the neighbors, for though he cultivated the farm after a fashion, yet he never raised enough to support himself and family, but, as he always had money enough to pay his bills, it was plain that he had something to depend upon besides the land.

Waybit was gruff, surly, and repelled all familiarity, so that at first the neighbors believed him to be all that was bad, a rascal hiding from an outraged law, and procuring his money by foul deeds, but in fourteen years a man will live down many an idle rumor, and long ago the talk had ceased; Daddy Waybit, as he was commonly called, was regarded as a pretty good citizen by all, and the explanation which, when in his cups one day, he had vouchsafed to give, that he had a small income, enough to live on, was accepted.

The child, whose name was Helen, although made to work around the farm exactly the same as though she was a boy, was educated by the old man in the most careful manner, and as both he and his wife were scholars, always speaking correctly, the girl grew up ladylike and refined, for she had never been allowed to associate with the coarse, common children of the neighborhood.

The only luxury that old Waybit afforded, liquor excepted, was reading matter, books and newspapers. Of these there was always plenty, so the girl did not grow up entirely in ignorance of the great world.

When Helen was fourteen years old Mrs. Waybit died after a short illness, and her last words ere her spirit took flight were to the child who, weeping, had begged her mother not to leave her.

"I am not your mother, child," she murmured, and then she had clasped her husband's hand and cried, wildly:

"See that justice is done this cruelly-treated girl or I will come back from the other world and haunt you by night, you villain!" and exhausted by the effort she had sunk back and expired.

The next day Daddy Waybit explained:

"You are not my child," he said; "my wife found you in the street, one cold winter's night, in a basket, deserted by your inhuman parents, and she resolved to care for you and she has always been anxious to have me tell you the truth about your parentage and many a time, has called me a villain because I refused. But you know all now and the poor woman can rest easy in her grave."

But, did she know all? There was a lurking suspicion in the girl's mind which strengthened as year grew into year that she did not know the whole truth.

She kept this to herself, though, for she knew Daddy Waybit well enough to understand that it would not profit her for him to know she doubted his words.

A weary life of drudgery Helen led after the death of Mrs. Waybit; not only all the cares of the house but the farm also came upon her shoulders, for the old man became more and more addicted to liquor.

Then across her desolate life, like a glorious sun lighting up a dull and drear December day, came the wanderer, Roland Reed. It was a case of love at first sight.

And while she was lifted to the very skies in love's young dream, old Daddy Waybit suddenly took it into his head to persecute the girl with his attentions, telling her that he would make her his second wife.

And the old man was so obstinate—so determined upon this point, that Helen feared unless some favorable accident occurred to cause him to change his mind, she would be compelled to seek refuge in flight.

Her lover's departure, the old man's persecution, the mystery surrounding her birth, her aspirations for a higher, nobler existence than the one she was now leading—with all these gloomy thoughts and conditions pressing upon her agitated brain, was it any wonder that the way seemed long and dreary?

At last, emerging from the pines, she came in sight of the old farm-house, but to her astonishment a light shone through the curtain of the kitchen window.

This was strange, for Daddy Waybit had

been drinking hard all the afternoon, and had laid down right after supper, and after he had once gone to bed in such a condition she had never known him to rise until the next morning.

A sudden impulse came to her to advance cautiously, peer into the kitchen through a crack in the rear wall, and discover the meaning of this unusual occurrence.

It was a happy thought, and Helen at once executed it, to discover a stranger within—a well-dressed, big, burly man, with a smoothly-shaven, fat face, short-cropped sandy hair, and a loud, coarse voice. Daddy Waybit sat opposite to him, an ugly look upon his hard, wrinkled face, and his eyes blinking like those of an owl brought suddenly into the light. Evidently he had been roused from his slumbers and he didn't relish it.

The two were in the midst of a hot discussion, and the girl could plainly hear every word.

"It's no use for you to beat about the bush!" the stranger declared, bringing his hand down upon the table with a heavy whack. "I want you to understand I've come here for the gal and I am going to have her, and that is the kind of a bird I am! Gayaway Muttiebud is my name, and the man that once has me put my flippers onto his shoulder is never anxious for a second spoonful of the soup. It's none of your business what I want her for! Mebbe it's for arson, mebbe for murder," and the stranger leaned over and hissed the word at the old man.

Helen's heart fairly rose in her throat; what did this coarse and brutal stranger mean by such horrid words?

"You are playing a bluff game, but you can't frighten me. Murder, bah!" Waybit replied.

"What do you know about the girl? What do you know 'bout what she has been up to?" the man cried. "You can't keep track of her all the time. Perhaps I should astonish your weak nerves if I told you that the gal had got a fellow whom she meets on the beach in secret, and you can bet all you've got in the world that that is where she has gone to now, and that is what is detaining her."

"It's a lie!" exclaimed Waybit, furiously.

"Nary time; but I'm not surprised that she succeeded in pulling the wool over your eyes, but she wasn't smart enough to fool me. I have been in the detective business too long; but now, to return to our mutton, I've got to have the girl; what I want with her is no business of yours. I'm going to take her, and you cannot help yourself, but as I allers believe in doing things on the quiet, I don't want to kick up any fuss 'bout the matter. I want you to introduce me to her, to-morrow, as an old friend of yours whom you have sent for to take her to the city, so that she can see a little of life. She won't have any suspicions, of course, and she'll come right along with me as docile as a lamb. And when the thing is fixed I will make a fair divvy with you for your trouble."

"Eh? I don't understand you!"

"Why, I will give you a fair share of the cash that I corral—the reward offered for her capture, you know," and then the speaker put his tongue in his cheek and winked in a peculiar way at Waybit.

"Reward for her capture?" repeated the other, whose brains were still so upset by liquor as to be incapable of reasoning clearly.

"That's what I said, and don't flatter yourself you can get her out of the way, for it can't be done! I've got every road covered in this neighborhood, and if you should attempt to run her off to any railroad station she would be nabbed the instant she set foot upon the platform. Now, you fix it, as I suggested, so that she will go with me quietly and I will let you in for a share. Refuse, and I will go to the nearest magistrate the first thing in the morning, swear out a warrant for her arrest, come here with the officers and take her by main force!"

The girl waited to hear no more, for she was filled with a terrible fear. What if this burly stranger should take it into his head to walk to the door, look out and discover her?

At all hazards she must escape! but the roads were guarded!

The simple child never dreamed that this guard was nothing but the idle vaunt of a man whose chief stock in trade was brass and brag.

There was a path through the pines which led to a small back-country road. By keeping to the back roads, avoiding the turnpikes, she thought she would be able to reach the county seat, Freehold, some sixteen miles away; and once there, in the morning, she could take a train to New York. No one would be apt to think of placing a spy on the watch at that distant point.

She knew every foot of the way, for she had been to Freehold with Daddy Waybit a half-dozen times, and as the old man had a decided aversion to paying tolls, which in South Jersey is no small item, he always avoided the turnpikes and went by the back roads.

Fortune favored her too, in one respect; she had sold some spring chickens of her own raising at Long Beach village that very afternoon, and

had the money in her pocket—six dollars! That would pay her fare to the city and enable her to live for a few days until she could find something to do, for in the innocence of her heart she did not think it would be a hard matter for a young, strong and willing girl, like herself, to procure employment in great overgrown New York.

She crossed the little field—stopped just for a moment on the edge of the pines to take a farewell look at the humble cottage which had sheltered her so long, waved her hands toward it, bidding it a mute good-by, while the tears stood in her eyes, then plunged into the recesses of the wood, and it would have been a skillful tracker indeed who could have followed the trail of the girl that night.

On she went with steady, resolute steps; she reached the back road, then struck off toward Eatontown, keeping a wary look around, fearing a spy in every dark covert.

Not a single soul did she encounter on her journey that night, and about two in the morning she came to the depot in Freehold.

The morning train for the city was standing on the track, ready for the engine. One of the cars was open; she entered it, stretched herself upon a seat, and slept soundly until the daylight coming in at the window awakened her. No one noticed her particularly. She slipped out, bought her ticket and the train started. She had escaped the toils.

CHAPTER III.

THE PLANTAGENETS.

ON Fifth avenue, in the city of New York, opposite Central Park, and above Sixtieth street, stands a mansion so palace-like in appearance that it commands the attention of even the most careless passer-by.

Without and within it was a palace, fit for a king, and yet it was only the private dwelling of the widow of a private gentleman, but he had been really a king among his fellows, and when he died left his disconsolate widow five million of dollars, all well and securely invested.

An odd genius he had been, too, in his lifetime. He was an Englishman by birth, named Gloster Plantagenet, or at least that is what he called himself, although before he got to be a rich man there were scoffers in abundance who sneered at this high-sounding appellation, but after he "made his pile," and was able to draw his check for a million or two without feeling it, the man bold enough to suggest that Plantagenet was a humbug and no more descended from the ancient English house of Plantagenet than from Julius Caesar, would have stood a good chance of being mobbed by all the money king's acquaintances.

Plantagenet was well in years and rather badly off for money when he landed upon our shores, and how he got his first start no one exactly knew; but, after he did get started, he went ahead with wonderful rapidity. Everything he touched seemed to turn into gold, and his luck became proverbial.

And after he arrived at the eminence of being one of the "kings" of New York, as he was a widower, the match-makers of society set themselves at work to find a wife for him, but he had been on the lookout himself, and the fashionable world were surprised one fine morning with the news that Gloster Plantagenet and Mrs. Matilda Livingstone, the widow of Judge Livingstone, were about to be married.

Against the lady nothing could be said on the score of birth, for she had been a Van Tromp before marrying the judge, a belle and a beauty, and even age and the fact that she had a son of sixteen did not diminish her charms.

But as far as money went, she was not well off. From her father she had inherited very little, from her husband scarcely anything, for the judge was one of those men who lived up to every cent of his income, no matter whether it was five thousand or fifty.

Rumor, that sharp-tongued jade, declared that the widow had married the railroad king for his money, and the world answered the aspersion by saying that, if it was true, Matilda Livingstone was the cheapest thing Gloster Plantagenet had ever bought.

Between the widow's son, Denby Livingstone, and the Englishman, the best of feeling did not exist. There had been no quarrel, for Plantagenet was one of those polished men who seem to glide through the world without friction, and the young man, too, was reserved and quiet, although his intimate associates declared that he could be as stubborn as a mule and as warlike as a lion, at times.

There was a lack of sympathy between the two, from the first, and the wife and mother, although she had perceived it and had done all she could to remove it, at last gave up the task, satisfied that as long as the two existed the feeling would continue.

A year or two before his death Plantagenet sent to England for his only living relatives—so he said—Richard Plantagenet, his nephew, and Viola Plantagenet, his niece—cousins, not brother and sister. The wife, although at first rather inclined to be jealous, thinking they

would supplant her boy, soon grew to like the pair.

And the girl, particularly, was such a captivating creature, that she completely won the wife's heart.

Plantagenet's acquaintances had a shrewd suspicion that the railroad king intended to make one of the two his heir, but when he died all his vast estate was left by will to his widow, neither Viola, Richard nor Denby being mentioned.

Mrs. Matilda Plantagenet was a peculiar woman; when she made up her mind to anything, it was almost an impossibility to get her to change.

She had looked upon Viola as calculated to make her son a good wife, and although she did everything in her power to throw them into each other's society, yet she did not speak openly about the matter, but a year or so after the death of her husband the idea seemed to develop into a regular mania; she then broached the matter to her son, but the young man, now twenty-four years old, did not receive it favorably, much to his mother's displeasure, and the result was they quarreled and Denby quitted the house in anger.

He had been gone a year, and now on this evening of which we write had just returned in obedience to his mother's pressing request.

The two were seated in Mrs. Plantagenet's private parlor, which was a front room on the second floor.

Mrs. Plantagenet was a woman of commanding figure and of dignified aspect, and still beautiful, although there were the cold, hard lines around the mouth and eyes which always indicate an iron will.

Denby, the son, was a well-proportioned young man, with regular, clear-cut features, pleasing expression, and the unmistakable stamp which a life of ease and luxury, free from care and toil, almost invariably gives.

His hair was cut short, cropped, in fact, after the idiotic fashion common to the fashionable young men of the day; his chin was smoothly shaven, and a small mustache shaded his upper lip.

He had his mother's dark-blue eyes, and the look which came from them was equally as resolute as the light which shone from hers.

And now mother and son were gazing upon each other like two enemies measuring strength before engaging in mortal combat.

The lady was the first to speak.

"You have returned at last," she said.

"Yes, because you sent for me; otherwise I should not have come."

"And are you ready now to comply with my wishes?"

"No more than when I departed."

"And when will you be ready?"

"Never!"

Mrs. Plantagenet stamped her foot angrily.

"Denby, you are a willful, disobedient son!"

"And you, mother, are unreasonable and imperious."

"What objection can you possibly have to Viola? Is she not everything that a man could desire? Where in this world can you find a girl more suitable for a wife?"

"I grant that she is perfection, but I do not care for her."

"And will you let a foolish whim stand in the way of my happiness?" she cried, imperiously.

"Denby, if I could see you married to that sweet girl I should be content to die, for my cup of happiness would be full to overflowing. I tell you it is necessary that this union should take place; it is for your own sake more than mine that I urge it. Why will you not confide in my superior judgment and yield to my wishes in this matter?"

"What are the reasons why this union should take place, and why for my sake? There must be no half-confidences, mother, if you expect me to yield up the happiness of my life by complying with your wishes."

"I have already explained."

"All that you have said merely goes to show that it is your whim that I should wed Viola, but you have not yet given a single reason why the union should take place, except that you fancy the match."

"And I am determined that it shall be made!" Mrs. Plantagenet cried, quickly, her countenance flushed with anger.

"And I am equally determined that it shall not be consummated."

"If you refuse to comply with my wishes, I will disinherit you! Not one single penny of my money shall you touch! You shall go forth into the world a beggar!"

The son laughed in scorn.

"And what, think you, do I care for your money? If I can survive the loss of your esteem and love, do you for a moment imagine that I care for the gold? I have a good education, and have a certain talent for some things, so the world says, and if I am not able to get my daily bread then I am content to starve."

The lady rose majestically.

"You shall have until to-morrow morning to decide," she said, "and it will be the last night

that you shall ever spend under this roof if you refuse."

"Mother, there isn't the least use in waiting until the morning; I can give you my answer to-night as well," he replied, also rising. "It is no! and it will be no for all time to come."

"Miserable, misguided boy!" she cried, turning upon him with a sudden fury, "and do you think I do not know why it is that you are so firm in this matter? When you first refused and quitted this house it was because your pride was piqued that I, your mother, dared to choose for you, but now you have another reason for refusing. Do not think that I am speaking idly or at random, for I am well informed concerning all your movements since you left this house; detectives have been upon your track and you have been constantly watched."

"If you hold firm in your resolve, you will be no son of mine, and think not that you will be able to enjoy the life which you have chosen in preference to the one which I selected, for I will use all my wealth and influence to baffle you in your designs, and although I will not strike at you, disobedient boy, yet I will at the one who has come between me and my long-cherished plans."

"Do not threaten, mother!" he cried, indignantly; "it is useless, and I defy you to harm me or those for whom I care. I thank you for the caution, though, for forewarned is forearmed, and now that I know what is before me, I will do my best to check you in every move. I understand, too, to whom I am indebted for this friendly interest in my affairs. Mr. Richard Plantagenet no doubt has been not only your adviser, but your confidential agent as well; and in this struggle which is to come, as you will not strike at me, so I will not aim a blow at you, but as for this interloper who has come between us, let him beware! he will have need of all the courage and skill of the doughty warrior whose name he bears to win in this contest. As for you, mother, you will live to repent the day when you forgot that I was your son and forbade me your house."

Then the young man quitted the room, and hardly had the door closed behind him when Richard Plantagenet came from a closet where he had been concealed.

"Did you hear him, Richard?" she cried, excitedly; "he will not yield an inch, and he dares to threaten me; but he shall do my will, or else I will crush him and this wretched girl who has come between us to the very dust!"

"My dear aunt, for his own sake it must be done, and now let me suggest a plan."

The two sat down and conferred together.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE DARK.

MIDNIGHT had come and gone, and the "wee, wee, wee" of the morning were at hand.

Mrs. Plantagenet had not retired to rest until late, and it was after one o'clock before she got fairly asleep.

After entering her apartment, which was a back room on the second story in the rear of her parlor, she had been careful to lock and bolt all the doors behind her, and undressing and putting on her night-robes, had gone to her private safe—an ornamental piece of furniture, gotten up after the fashion of a small bureau, so that one not acquainted with it would never have been apt to suspect what it was—unlocked it, cast a hurried glance around, as though she feared, notwithstanding the doors were all locked and bolted, that some one might be playing the spy upon her, then drew out a little secret drawer which contained two large, folded, legal-looking documents.

"I must find some safer place," she murmured, holding the papers in her hand, gazing thoughtfully upon the superscriptions, but not attempting to open them.

"Some safer place," she repeated, in a mechanical sort of tone; "but where—where? Ah! that will require some thought. Chance might lead to a discovery here, and if Denby knew, what would he say?"

With a deep sigh, she returned the papers to the secret drawer, shut it up, closed the safe and locked it carefully.

"To-morrow—ay, to-morrow will do; to-morrow I will see about it; it shall not remain here another night," she murmured, her mind evidently far away.

And turning down the gas so that there was just light enough to distinguish objects in the room she went to bed.

The clocks in the city had struck three—that hour when human sleep is said to be the deepest, when there came a low, cautious knock at the massive door which led from the hall into Mrs. Plantagenet's apartment; but the mistress of the mansion, firmly wrapped in slumber's chains, heard it not.

A second, a third time, the knock was repeated, but the lady's sleep was unbroken.

Then the knocker, satisfied that the inmate of the room was not likely to be easily disturbed, proceeded to action.

He applied a pair of "nippers"—a burglar's tool used for turning a key in the lock from the outside of a door by seizing the end of the key. Slowly the key turned, and the bolt of the lock

moved back without a sound. The door now was fastened only by the heavy bolt on the inside.

From his pocket the man took a hood of black crape, arranged to cover both head and face, but with eye-holes, so that the wearer could distinguish what he was about.

This he drew on, and then, cautiously turning the knob, opened the door, the strong bolt within yielding immediately to the pressure without resistance—showing that it had previously been tampered with.

The door open, the intruder cautiously looked into the room; then with noiseless steps he advanced directly to the bedside, and—like one well acquainted with Mrs. Plantagenet's habits—drew from under the pillow her pocketbook, from which he abstracted the key of the safe, disdaining to help himself to three one-hundred-dollar bills which were also in the same receptacle.

Straight to the safe he went and unlocked it without trouble, evidently being familiar with it, but the location of the secret drawer puzzled him for some time, for that was what he was after. He found it at last, opened it, and took out the two documents Mrs. Plantagenet had examined before retiring to rest.

"Aha!" he muttered, in a fierce chuckle, as he grasped the paper. "Now, Denby, we will see who will triumph!"

There was a rustling of the bed-clothes, and he sprang to his feet in alarm.

Mrs. Plantagenet was wide awake and sitting up in the bed!

He had thrust the papers inside his breast at the first alarm, and now, perceiving that he was discovered, he made a dash for the door, but on the way was intercepted by Mrs. Plantagenet, who, with rare courage, sprang at him like a tigress.

"Help, help, murder!" she cried.

The two grappled; soon assistance would come, for the woman's shriek had rung shrilly through the house. Understanding this the intruder exerted all his strength, tore himself loose from her grasp, and hurried her violently backward, then dashed through the door, closing it after him.

The woman, thrown backward with such violence, struck her head against the marble-topped table in the center of the apartment and was stunned by the shock.

When the frightened servants entered the room, headed by Miss Viola, they found Mrs. Plantagenet senseless and bleeding.

As quickly as possible she was placed upon the bed and a messenger dispatched for a doctor. He soon arrived, his residence being near at hand.

Under his care she partially revived, but her senses seemed to be affected by the shock which she had received, for only wild and whirling words came from her lips.

"Oh, Denby, Denby, my boy!" she moaned, "how could you wound your poor mother, who would have gladly given her life to save you from harm?"

"Her mind wanders; she does not know what she is saying," the doctor observed, and immediately he gave orders to have the apartment cleared of all but the nurse.

But the mischief had been done, and grave suspicions were excited.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE TRAIN.

FULL of anxiety was the heart of the girl as the train went on its way to the city. The boasting words of the burly stranger were fresh in her memory, and, for the first six or eight stations, she trembled with apprehension every time a passenger entered the car, but as she journeyed further and further away from her starting-point, and found that no one took any particular notice of her, she began to regain her courage.

Her pursuers would surely never think of looking for her so far away.

After about half the distance to the city had been accomplished, Helen suddenly remembered the letter which her lover had given her on the previous evening.

Surely the time had now come to open it!

Acting upon the impulse, she did so.

Inclosed in the envelope was a ten-dollar bill, and a brief note, which ran as follows:

"If you are compelled to leave home and go to the city, I inclose you ten dollars which will support you for a week or two, and in that time you can find me. I cannot give you any very definite directions, but, after you arrive in New York, go daily at twelve o'clock, noon, to the obelisk in Central Park, near Fifth avenue and opposite Eightieth street. The obelisk is on a little mound. Remain on the hill in front of the obelisk and facing the avenue for ten or fifteen minutes, then descend, cross the drive and take a seat on one of the benches opposite; wait a half-hour or so, and, if I do not come, return home and repeat the same thing the next day. All this I know seems very mysterious, but there are good reasons for it. Have faith in my honesty, and believe me when I say that I am truly yours until death puts an end to both love and life."

Then followed the bold signature:

"ROLAND READE."

A pleasant smile was upon the girl's face, and

a strong love-light shone from her brilliant eyes; she was resolved to obey the instructions to the letter.

At the next station a benevolent, countrified old gentleman, with a round, ruddy face, fringed by iron-gray hair, and ornamented with a short beard of the same hue, came into the car. He was plainly and comfortably dressed, looking like a well-to-do farmer.

There was a vacant seat by the side of the girl, about the only one in the car, and the old gentleman asked if it was engaged.

Helen, suspicious of danger, had taken a good look at him, afraid at first that he might be an agent of the burly stranger who had talked so freely of hunting her down, but the apprehension vanished almost as quickly as it had arisen, for in such a mild-looking, honest-appearing old gentleman, there could surely be no guile, so she answered that the seat was at his service.

He sat down beside her, and the two speedily got into conversation, the old gentleman being naturally talkative.

"Going to the city, hey, miss?" he had inquired.

Helen answered in the affirmative, and then he stated that he was also bound for "York," and immediately proceeded to give a full history of himself and family.

He used to live in the city but his health wasn't very good, so he had gone into farming in a small way; his health had improved, but his pocket had suffered, for his farming operations had been anything but profitable, so his wife and daughter and son, all of whom mortally hated the country, as he confidentially informed his companion, had returned to New York and opened a small hotel on South Fifth avenue.

Fifth avenue was of course well known to the girl as being the great street of Gotham, and she formed a very favorable impression of the old gentleman and his relatives.

Then, after the fashion of the country folks, actuated by that devouring curiosity which seems to be natural to all rural denizens, the old fellow put the girl through a regular cross-examination.

"Live down in the country, I s'pose?"

If she had not felt so sure that her companion was exactly what he looked to be, an inquisitive old countryman, she would have hesitated to answer, but as it was, she saw no harm in satisfying his curiosity, so endeavored to reply freely, and yet at the same time keep in reserve particulars which might lead to her being traced and apprehended.

"Yes, sir, I have lived in the country."

"Freehold, mebbe?"

"Well, not exactly at Freehold."

"Yas, near it, I reckon; pretty place; I ain't much acquainted in that neighborhood, though. Don't you live in the country now?"

"No, sir."

"Oh, I see; folks moved to the city?"

"I haven't any folks; I am an orphan."

"Sakes alive! you don't tell me so! Well, well, now that is too bad. A nice, likely gal sich as you are and no folks to take care on her. I s'pose you've got friends in the city, though?"

"Yes, sir," and a slight flush appeared upon her innocent young face; she thought of her lover, Roland—he was in the city somewhere, and such a friend as he was worth a hundred of the common kind.

The shrewd old man had keen eyes; he noticed the color which his question had called up and easily guessed the reason.

"I s'pose you are going to your friends now?" not appearing to notice what he so plainly saw.

"I—no, sir, I do not know the address, and I suppose it will take me some time to find it."

"Like as not," he observed; "I tell you these pesky big cities are awful hard places to find anybody in unless you have got the street and number right down, so you kin go straight to the house. You'll excuse my axing you so many questions, you know, but I am kinder an old foggy 'bout some things, and when I sees a likely young gal like you traveling all alone, I kinder git interested in her, like as if she was my own darter; I've got a gal up to York, jest 'bout your age, you know."

"Oh, sir, I do not feel at all offended at your questions."

"Course not; that's the right way to look at it, but some of the gals nowadays are so pesky stuck-up that it is 'bout what a man's life is worth for to say a civil word to them. Well, now, you see, we have jest got to talking, jest by accident, and I'll bet a cooky I know how you are situated. I will be able to be of some assistance to you, seeing as how you ain't very well acquainted with the city. Awful bad place, I tell yer, New York, for a young gal what ain't posted. How might I call your name, my dear?"

For a moment the girl hesitated. She had always been called Helen Waybit, but when the old man revealed to her that she was not his child, he also said he did not know whose child she was. Helen, though, had a suspicion, which she could not get rid of, although there was absolutely no foundation for it, that the old toper did know, but for some purpose of his own

chose to keep her in ignorance. Her right name was not Helen Waybit; why give it, then, and so expose herself to the risk of being traced and captured?

No! Henceforth she must be known by another appellation, and so she gave the first that came into her head. She had no home, and therefore Helen Home should be her name.

"Well, I swear! Helen Home!" observed the old gentleman, repeating the name; "why, that is a right pretty name, and you seem to be a real nice kind of a gal; it's kinder of a shame that you shouldn't know exactly where your friends live in the city so as to be able to go right to them. What do you expect to do in York—work at something, maybe?"

"Yes, sir; I suppose there will be no difficulty about getting employment," she asked, a little anxiously.

"Sakes alive, no! I reckon there is allers plenty of work in York for anybody at all willing to work, but, it may take some leetle time to hunt it up, you know: work ain't a-running 'round on the streets begging people to take hold."

"Oh, I do not expect to get it right away."

"And you will want some place to stop, too, while you are looking? Have you got any trade?"

"No, sir, but I am a good seamstress and can run almost any kind of a sewing-machine; and I am also used to housework."

"You'll be all right then; you'll get enough to do and you won't have to wait very long for it, either; and if you are willing to do housework, why York is full of good places for tidy American girls, 'cos they are hard to get, and at good wages too; but what I was going to say, if you don't know of any place to stop, you might come to my wife's hotel where you will be right comfortable."

Now the idea of going to a hotel on Fifth avenue rather frightened the girl, for she thought it would surely be a very expensive place, and in her simple, honest way explained that she was not very well provided with money and must husband her means.

"Oh, my wife won't charge you much and you can take some of it out in work, if you like," the old gentleman replied, his face glowing with benevolence.

A silent prayer to Heaven rose from the girl's heart. Surely Providence was indeed watching over her foot-steps that thus, at the very beginning of her journey, a friend had appeared to aid her.

"Have you any baggage, my dear?" the old man asked, as the train rolled into the depot at Jersey City.

"No, sir."

In her mad haste to get away from the burly stranger who was threatening to arrest and imprison her, she had fled without taking anything but the clothes which she wore.

"Neither have I, so we will take a street-car."

They crossed the ferry together, and as they passed through the ferry gates on the New York side, two policemen, lounging by the entrance, noticed them.

"Hallo," said one, "has Papa Canary picked up a fresh bird, or is that some decoy duck?"

"One of the old gang, of course; looks don't count with that family. Why, twig the old buffer! Who would think he had a tongue fit to wheedle a bird out of a tree or charm a 'stake' out of the shrewdest banker alive?"

Strange words in regard to the benevolent-looking old gentleman, but in this world appearances are often deceptive.

CHAPTER VI.

INSNARED.

ON South Fifth avenue, not far from Canal street, is a narrow, dingy two-story-and-attic brick house; on the ground floor is a saloon and over the saloon door a small sign reads:

OLD TOWER OF LONDON HOTEL.

The saloon was not an inviting-looking one, and yet it had a certain run of custom, as the police could testify, and the lodging-rooms over the saloon, although meanly furnished and not at all calculated to attract a casual customer a second time, were generally pretty well patronized.

To the Old Tower of London Hotel, Mr. Canary—Mr. William Canary as he had informed the girl was his name—(although if he had been inclined to be confidential, he would have said he was much more often called "Papa" Canary than anything else)—conducted the girl.

The appearance of South Fifth avenue, as well as the hotel itself, completely astonished the girl.

She had been to the city with Daddy Waybit a half-dozen times in the last few years, and so was accustomed to the looks of the lower part of New York, but of the rest she only knew through the papers and books, and the disreputable appearance of what she innocently supposed was Gotham's great street astounded her.

But, having perfect faith in her guide, she entered the house without hesitation.

Within the hotel, in a dingy, shabby little

parlor, she was introduced by Mr. Canary to his family.

First, there was Mrs. Canary—Betsy, as the old gentleman called her, fondly—a tall, broad-shouldered, hard-featured, determined-looking woman, middle-aged and gray-haired; then the daughter, Kathleen, a copy of her mother, except that she was not so stout and had fiery red hair; and the son, a slightly-built, consumptive-looking youth, not particularly prepossessing in face, and his appearance rendered still more ugly by the fact that his hair was cropped close to his head.

Joseph was the name under which his father introduced him to the country girl, and as she clasped his cold and clammy hand, which was more like the hand of the dead than the living, Helen instinctively felt the same sort of a repulsion which she had once before experienced in her life, and that was when after berries in a huckleberry patch in a swamp amid the pines, she had almost trodden upon an ugly black snake, as long as her arm, and the horrid creature for a moment seemed to design making an attack upon her, coiling its slimy folds together and hissing in menace, but the girl had a little stick in her hand, and the snake, after a short pause, had glided away as if awed by the weapon.

The old man, whose shrewd eyes seemed to see everything, immediately perceived that his hopeful had not made a favorable impression, and hastened to counteract it.

"Joe, run down stairs like a good fellow and tell the gal to git us a little snack; I'm as hungry as can be, and I reckon, Miss Helen, you wouldn't object to pick a bit."

The young man took himself off at once, and then the old chap, in his bustling way, explained that he had brought Miss Home to stop with them.

The girl, though innocent and unsuspecting, was not lacking in that keen perception natural to her sex, and when the old gentleman made the announcement, she fancied she could discern a peculiar look upon the faces of the mother and daughter which indicated that they were not exactly pleased at the idea of her taking up her quarters with them.

And on her part she was not impressed with their appearance. Mr. Canary seemed to be a nice old gentleman, but she could not say she liked the looks of the rest of the family; still, she reflected, that might be because she was so ignorant of the world.

"And, Kitty, can't you take Miss Home to a room where she will be able to lay aside her things while breakfast is being prepared?" the master of the house continued.

"Oh, yes," replied the girl, looking at her father in a peculiar way, as it appeared to Helen.

"Take her right into my room, Kitty," observed the old lady; "it is on this floor, so that you won't have to go up stairs."

"And I do declare, Miss Home, if you don't look all beat out!" the old gentleman exclaimed, sympathetically. "Say, mother, s'pose you bring up a cup of coffee, and a bit of toast, and a leetle piece of steak or a couple of nice fresh eggs for our guest, and save her the trouble of going into the dining-room."

Helen protested immediately that not for the world could she think of putting them to such inconvenience, but Mr. Canary laughed at the idea.

"Sakes alive, child! it won't be any trouble! Make her a nice, strong cup of fresh coffee, mother; have it good and strong, so that it will tone her right up—that extra kind of coffee, mother, that you make."

Again the girl fancied she saw that peculiar expression upon the faces of mother and daughter, but when she looked again it had vanished.

"Well, I s'pose, then, I had better show Miss Home to the room that she will occupy while she remains with us," Mrs. Canary remarked.

"Yes, I reckon that will be best."

"I am sorry to put you to so much trouble," the girl began, but the old man interrupted:

"No trouble in the world; we want to make you feel right to home here; just like as if you had lived with us all your life, you know."

And so she was conducted up stairs to a small back room, tolerably well furnished.

"There, I think you will be comfortable here," Mrs. Canary remarked, trying to appear as kind and motherly as possible, "and if there is anything you want, don't hesitate to ask for it, just the same as if you were in your own home, my dear. And now, if you will excuse me, I will go and get the coffee ready." Then the old lady departed.

"Shall I help you off with your things?" the daughter asked; she had accompanied her mother and Miss Home up stairs.

"Oh, no, thank you; I will not put you to so much trouble."

"No trouble at all; of course we want to do everything we can to make you comfortable. You will find this to be quite a pleasant room, nice and quiet."

And just here there came the sound of terrific thumps on the side wall of the apartment.

Helen jumped to her feet, for she had sat down, and even Miss Canary started, for it real-

ly seemed as if the whole wall was about to tumble in.

"My sakes! how that frightened me! But it isn't anything but the workmen next door; they are tearing down the building in order to put up a new one; that's all; but before they commenced it was nice and quiet, and it will be so again after they get through, so you mustn't mind it," the girl explained.

Then she said she would go and help her mother to bring the things up, and withdrew.

Left alone, Helen removed her hat and cloak, attended to her toilet, and then looked out of the one solitary window to note the surroundings.

Dismal enough they were, too, for of all ugly sights the back yards of the overcrowded houses in the poor quarters of a great city can hardly be surpassed.

A sigh escaped from the girl's lips as she looked out upon the miserable view, where all the surroundings seemed to denote poverty and degradation.

This was not the picture of New York that her fancy had painted!

Someway, although she had been received in so friendly a manner, she felt melancholy; her spirits were depressed; a foreboding of misfortune seemed to hang over her; and yet there did not appear to be the slightest cause for it, except that there was something about the mother, daughter and son which she did not like, yet the old gentleman certainly was goodness personified.

"It is foolish for me to harbor these gloomy thoughts, when there is so slight reason," she murmured, turning away from the window and resuming her seat by the table. "It is because I have left the place where I was reared, and plunged out into the busy, bustling stream of life, and now I must either swim or sink."

It was some fifteen minutes before the refreshments were brought, so Helen had plenty of time for reflection, but her thoughts were disturbed half a dozen times at least by the violent pounding of the workmen in the next building on the wall of her apartment.

The old gentleman and his daughter brought up the coffee and steak, all nicely prepared, and looking very inviting.

"There," said Mr. Canary, arranging the dishes on the table, "now, if you don't mind, I will sit down and pick a bit with you myself."

Of course Helen was glad of his company, so the father poured the coffee and prepared the steak, pressing the girl to eat all the while.

"I don't know how the coffee will suit you," he added; "it's pretty strong; but we all like it strong, and it won't do you a mite of hurt, if you can drink it;—fact, it will be the best thing you can take; it will brace you right up!"

"It is very strong," Helen remarked, as she sipped it, and it had an odd taste, too.

"You ain't used to the genuine article, mebbe," Canary remarked. "Take a good swig; it will give you new life!"

The girl obeyed, but instead of giving her new life, the potent draught seemed to sap the old. Soon the room swam around her; all control of herself gradually passed away, and she seemed to have fallen into a swoon, and yet, though her limbs were powerless, her brain still worked steadily, and she was conscious of all that transpired around her.

CHAPTER VII.

AN UNEXPECTED EVENT.

ALL that could be done for Mrs. Plantagenet was done, but the lady had received a dreadful shock and the doctor shook his head when he came in the morning and made a careful examination.

Mrs. Plantagenet was a portly woman, and as she had been thrown backward with considerable force, by the midnight intruder, the corner of the marble table, against which she had fallen, truly had inflicted a wound to make the old family doctor look anxious.

She had lingered in a swoon, too, despite all the efforts of the doctor and nurse to revive her, until about eight o'clock in the morning, just after the physician had arrived for his second call.

Speculation naturally had been at work in regard to how the lady had been hurt, and some dark rumors were in circulation among the servants in the house.

All the members of the family were gathered by the bedside of the sufferer when the doctor arrived. There was her son, Denby, with his handsome, noble face; Richard Plantagenet, tall, dark-browed and with shifting, uncertain gray eyes that rarely looked any one straight in the face; Viola Plantagenet, with her light, yellow hair, roguish blue eyes, and fair red and white complexion—good type of Anglo-Saxon beauty, and so different in appearance from Richard that a stranger would never have guessed there was any relationship between the two.

In addition to these three there were a couple of the servants, old and trusty servitors who had been with Mrs. Plantagenet for years.

"What do you think, doctor?" asked Denby,

after the physician had made his examination and sat looking at the patient with a very grave face.

The sick woman opened her eyes, and a thrill went through the group at the unexpected sight.

"Oh, aunt!" cried Viola, impulsively.

"I am very ill, doctor," Mrs. Plantagenet murmured, in feeble accents.

The doctor had a delicate question to put, he feared, from what little he knew of the circumstances, but it was his duty to learn all he could in regard to her wound.

"You must be careful and not excite yourself, my dear madam," he remarked, soothingly, after the fashion of his kind.

"I do not think it will hurt me to talk a little."

"Oh, no, if you will be careful. How did you receive your injury?"

"There was a robber in this room—"

All the listeners started in surprise at this intelligence.

"I had retired to rest, but I am a very light sleeper, and was awakened by some one opening the safe yonder. I looked, and beheld a man kneeling before it. Without a thought of the consequences—instead of attempting to alarm the house at first, as I ought to have done, I sprang up and endeavored to detain the intruder. He was masked and evidently prepared to take life rather than be captured, so when I seized him he pushed me over backward; in falling I struck against the table, the shock stunning me."

"The safe should be instantly examined, then, in order to see what has been taken," Richard suggested.

"I do not think the robber had time to secure anything," the lady observed, faintly, her strength evidently failing. "I awoke too quickly, but let the matter alone; this hurt will not amount to anything; do not attempt to discover who the intruder is. There must be no scandal—it would be too dreadful—too awful," and then her eyes closed wearily.

The doctor looked around upon the white faces which were at the bedside, for each and every one felt that the shadow of a dreadful suspicion hung over that ill-fated household.

"Her mind wanders, I fear," the doctor remarked; "it is natural in all such cases as this, where the head is affected."

"Do you think there is any real danger that this may prove serious?" Richard asked.

"It is impossible to say at present, but we must hope for the best," responded the cautious physician.

But from that time forth, despite the care that was so freely lavished upon the sufferer, she sunk slowly into the grave, never again regaining sensibility.

And when the doctor saw there was very little chance of Mrs. Plantagenet's surviving, he consulted the two young men.

"Mrs. Plantagenet will die," he said, "and I fear we have been criminally neglectful in not bringing the matter before the proper authorities. I hesitated, in accordance with her wish that the matter should not be touched, but now that she is almost certain to die, I think it is high time the detectives are put upon the track of the midnight ruffian who committed this fiendish assault."

"I agree with you, Doctor Fosdike, and I fear that too much time already has been lost," Denby exclaimed, warmly, for now in the hour of his mother's peril all thoughts of the coldness and misunderstanding which had existed between them had vanished like the dewdrops before the rays of the morning sun.

"I regret allowing ourselves to be influenced by her wishes that this matter be kept secret," Richard observed, regretfully. "I fear we have permitted too much time to elapse, and that it will not be possible now to trace the scoundrel who has committed this atrocious act."

"I did not for a moment imagine the case would have a fatal ending," the doctor admitted. "Mrs. Plantagenet was so full of life and health I would have staked my reputation, almost, that she would have recovered in a week. But human life is a frail thing, and sometimes yields to the slightest jar."

"The authorities had better be informed immediately, I presume?" Denby remarked.

"Yes, and I will take that task upon myself. The superintendent of police and I are old acquaintances, and since this affair so far has not created any talk, everybody regarding it as an accident, it is just as well that it should be kept quiet, for by so doing the interests of justice can be conserved. I will go directly to the chief and explain the matter to him; he will put some good men on the case, and the first intimation the world at large will have of the matter will be the news of the arrest of the scoundrel."

"It is a pity we have not got a list of the contents of the safe, in order to discover whether anything is missing," Richard observed, when the doctor finished.

"It was not my mother's habit to keep any money in it, so far as I know," Denby explained.

"She used it almost exclusively for jewelry and private papers."

"I suppose of course you would know, upon

examination, if anything had been taken?" Richard queried.

"Alas! I fear not," Denby replied, shaking his head sadly. "There has been a cloud between my mother and myself during the last six or eight months, and she has not intrusted to me the particulars of any of her business affairs. But you—you have been her confidant, more of a son to her than I—do you not know what the safe contained?"

"Oh, no; you are mistaken!" the other exclaimed. "She never confided any of her affairs to me, except her wishes in regard to a certain marriage."

"Don't speak of it!" Denby cried. "If it had not been for that, the estrangement would not have existed!"

"Well, gentlemen, I will lay the matter before the proper authorities, and you may rest assured the affair shall be managed as quietly as possible."

And thus the conference ended.

True to his word, the doctor went at once to the office of the superintendent of police and laid before him all the particulars of the mysterious affair.

The chief listened attentively.

"It is a strange case," he confessed. "I regret that you did not let me know of it before."

"Yes, yes, I am sorry myself; it was an error on my part, I admit, but Mrs. Plantagenet was so anxious that the matter should not be made public; and then, really, I had no fears in regard to her life; she had received a pretty severe shock, but as she was in the best of health, a strong, robust woman, there wasn't, in my judgment, hardly one chance out of a hundred against her recovery."

"And you say now she is certain to die?"

"Yes, she cannot possibly survive many hours; her death may be looked for at any moment."

"A deal of valuable time has been lost," the official murmured, reflectively, speaking more to himself than to the doctor.

"I regret it, I assure you, from the very bottom of my heart, for, of course, I understand this delay will render it difficult for you to trace and capture the fugitive; he has had time to put the ocean between himself and the scene of his crime."

"Oh, not a bit of it!" the superintendent exclaimed, decidedly. "The man is no common rascal, and, from what you say, it is evident he didn't intend to hurt the old lady; that was probably an accident. You see, he didn't use a weapon—only broke from her grasp, and flung her off, so that he could get away. The man who did the trick is right at hand, but it will be a difficult matter, I am afraid, to bring the assault home to him. These family affairs are the deuce and all sometimes."

The doctor departed, much puzzled, and very much disturbed.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ACCUSATION.

On the night of the day of the interview between Dr. Fosdike and the superintendent of police, Mrs. Plantagenet breathed her last.

The doctor had come in before retiring for the night, and his experienced eye noticed that the end was near at hand.

All the family were summoned immediately, for the doctor had a hope that, in the last convulsive throes of life, the afflicted woman might revive sufficiently to speak.

But it was not so fated; tranquilly, with hardly a last parting gasp, she passed away—so quietly that the watchers by the bedside were hardly conscious of the fact.

And now that death had come it was necessary to call in the coroner.

A jury was got together, and, as often happens under like circumstances, all the evidence bearing upon the case was not brought before them. In fact, the affair was shrouded in the deepest mystery, and had it not been for the injured woman's declaration no one would have suspected that any intruder had been in her apartment, although the testimony proved that when the household were roused by Mrs. Plantagenet's screams, and came in haste to her assistance, the door of her room was unlocked, and the door of the safe was open, while one of the maids who attended the lady, and assisted her to disrobe for the night, testified that, after leaving the apartment, she distinctly heard her mistress both lock and bolt the door after she—the maid—had quitted the room; but not a particle of evidence was produced to show that any one within the mansion knew of the presence of any intruder within its walls that night.

Then, too, as far as could be ascertained, no valuables had been abstracted from the room or safe.

The maid further testified that, after putting some valuable jewelry of her mistress into the safe, Mrs. Plantagenet had locked it and put the key into her wallet, which, in accordance with her usual custom she had put under the head of her bed. In this wallet, too, were some three hundred dollars, for Mrs. Plantagenet had counted the money before her. This had not been touched.

There were stupid heads on the jury, of

course, and one of them reasoned that no one had been in the room, as assumed, but that Mrs. Plantagenet, in a sort of delirium, had got up, unlocked the safe and the room door, and then had fallen, and in falling had struck her head against the table; but the verdict was that "Mrs. Plantagenet had died from injuries received at the hands of a party or parties unknown."

True to his promise to the doctor, the superintendent detailed two of his best detectives to look into the matter, expressly cautioning them to keep their business to themselves and not to reveal, even to their brother detectives, that they were employed on the case; for, as in all such peculiar and difficult cases, the first thing to be done was to throw the guilty party off his guard by getting him to believe that the search had been given up. Thus lulled into fancied security, the culprit would be less cautious, and by some word or act give the detectives a clew.

The first point in the game was to find out what had been taken from the safe, for the chief was satisfied that the masked man had secured what he came after before being disturbed by the waking of the old lady.

No valuables evidently, for the jewelry in the lock-up had not been touched; there must have been, therefore, some other motive for the intrusion. What was it?

Papers!—some important documents, no doubt, and yet no one seemed to miss anything.

After the death of Mrs. Plantagenet, Denby, as her only heir, with the assistance of the legal firm who had always attended to her business, made a careful search among the effects of the dead woman for a will, although the lawyers, in the beginning, told the young man that they did not think any such thing existed, for they had never drawn any out, and most certainly the lady would never have gone to any one else for such a service.

Billcock & Billcock was the name of the legal firm now, but years ago it had been Billcock, Livingstone & Billcock, for the judge, Mrs. Plantagenet's first husband, had been one of the partners at the time of his marriage.

The brothers Billcock, Joshua and Josiah, were two old bachelors, sharp, shrewd pieces of Connecticut hardware, keen as razors, close as grindstones, but as honest as the day.

To the young man, the elder partner, who always did all the talking, prim, formal, ramrod-like Joshua, frankly said:

"My dear Mr. Denby, there isn't any will, but of course, as a mere matter of form, we will examine all the papers left by your lamented mother, but I know that we shall not find a will among them. I speak thus positively, for I know exactly what I am talking about. On the very morning of the day on which she received the injury which led to her death, she came down to the office and had a long interview with me, and the main thing for which she had come was to consult me in regard to a will which she designed making. She spoke very freely about the matter, and I then learned for the first time that there was a misunderstanding existing between you and her. I will not conceal from you, Mr. Denby, that she spoke very bitterly in regard to yourself. She had set her heart upon a marriage between you and Miss Viola, and she said she had summoned you home to learn your final answer."

"Yes, it is true."

"And, furthermore, she declared that if you did not consent to the marriage, she was resolved that you should no longer be as a son to her, but she would make a will bequeathing to you only the interest on fifty thousand dollars, invested in Chemical Bank stock, so that you would not starve as long as you lived, but the balance of her property she would divide between the only two living relatives of her dead husband, Richard and Viola Plantagenet, giving nine-tenths to Viola, with the exception of a few small bequests."

"I remonstrated with her as strongly as possible against such an unjust will, for so I considered it, and as an old friend of the family, as well as her legal adviser for years, I did not hesitate to express my opinion, and pretty openly, too, contrary to my usual custom. She was firm-set in this purpose, though, and all that I could succeed in doing was to obtain from her a promise that she would not do anything rashly—that she would take time and meditate over the matter before executing the document, for she did you justice, Denby, my boy, and freely owned you had been as good a son in every respect as any mother needed to have, with the exception of this one thing, but that to her was all-important."

"Now you see why I feel so sure that your mother did not leave any will."

And it seemed as if the lawyer was right, for not the slightest trace of any such document could be discovered.

As her sole heir, then, it was plain that Denby would inherit all, and the lawyers, acting under the young man's orders, immediately took the proper steps to put him in possession of the estate.

Two weeks more went by.

The detectives had been working untiringly,

but so far with little success; and so carefully had they managed matters that, with the exception of the superintendent, not a soul suspected their game, although in various disguises they had penetrated into the very mansion itself and cunningly cross-examined the servants.

When satisfied that there was no barrier between himself and the fortune left by his mother, Denby sought an interview with Viola.

Not a word had been exchanged between Denby and Viola and Richard in regard to money matters since the untimely death. The two met in the grand parlor.

"Viola," he said, and as he addressed the beautiful girl he took her soft, white hands in his, "if my mother had lived, I am satisfied your future would have been provided for. As my mother's son I intend to do no less. This house is your home, of course, as long as you choose to remain, but I shall, in time, give it a mistress, and then it may not be agreeable for you to remain, although you will be as welcome as the sun. All barriers are removed, now, between myself and the girl I loved. She gave her affection, when she thought me only a poor wandering artist, a Bohemian, hardly able to gain his daily bread, but now I can place my country pearl in a setting that will well become her beauty, in a station that she will adorn. But in order to render both you and your cousin Richard independent, I intend, as I am sure my mother would have done had she lived, to settle upon each of you a hundred thousand dollars!"

"Oh!" cried the girl, her bright blue eyes beaming with gratitude, "Denby, you are the most noble of men, and if the woman whom you love does not worship you, it is because she is ignorant of your true worth."

"I hope she will," he replied, smiling at the girl's enthusiasm. "The future has been black enough; but now, thank Heaven, the clouds have cleared away!"

The door opened and two stalwart policemen came stalking into the parlor while a group of frightened servants gathered in the doorway.

"Mr. Denby Livingstone?" said the foremost.

"That is my name!"

"I arrest you for murder!" the man cried, laying his hand upon Denby's shoulder and producing a pair of handcuffs with the other.

With a wild cry Viola started back.

"Murder! Oh, no, it is impossible!"

CHAPTER IX.

IN CHARGE.

"ARREST me!" cried Denby, utterly astounded by this unexpected event.

"That is what I said, sir," responded the officer, respectfully, but firmly. "If you are Mr. Denby Livingstone, you are my prisoner."

"There must be some mistake!" the young man exclaimed, much more amazed than alarmed.

"No, sir, there is no mistake; here is the warrant," and the policeman put the legal document into his hands. "You are charged with murder, sir."

"Oh, this is too absurd! With the murder of whom, pray?"

"Mrs. Matilda Plantagenet," replied the officer, in a business-like way.

A loud shriek came from the white lips of the girl at this terrible announcement; then she fainted dead away, while Denby was so horrified he could only stare at the policeman in a dazed sort of way, like a man who had been stunned by a heavy blow.

"I accused of murdering my dear mother?" he stammered, at last, as if unable to believe that he had heard aright.

"Your mother?" echoed the officer, who was ignorant of this fact, and much astonished now that he knew the truth.

The servants, rushing to the assistance of the fainting girl, raised her from the floor and placed her upon the sofa.

"You see, sir, there must be some mistake, for this accusation is horribly ridiculous."

"Here's the warrant, and that is all we know about it, of course," replied the officer.

"You understand, we have got to obey orders, sir," put in the other policeman. "We don't know anything but that. At the court things will probably be straightened out, but if I were you, sir, I wouldn't make any talk about the matter, because if there is anything in this charge, what you say to us may be used against you. So you had better come along quietly, sir, and the judge will straighten the hull thing out when you get before him."

"But to be paraded through the streets, handcuffed like a felon!" cried Denby, all the blood within his veins boiling at the revolting indignity.

The first policeman looked at the second, and he, understanding what his comrade meant, shook his head.

"Well, sir, if you will give us your word as a gentleman to come along quietly, without endeavoring to escape, we will not put the bracelets on you, and as to going through the streets, we thought it likely that a gentleman like yourself wouldn't like that sort of thing, and so we

brought a carriage along; it is outside at the door, and if you care to pay for the use of it, it is at your service."

"Thank you, sir; I will see that you shall not lose anything by this kindness," the young man observed, gratefully. "Where am I to be taken?"

"Before Judge Himmilstein, in Fifty-fourth street."

"I do not know him."

"Easiest man in the world to get acquainted with," replied the officer, jocosely. "He's one of the boys."

"I presume I had better send for my lawyers."

"Yes, sir, it would be as well, for this is a pretty serious charge."

Denby called one of the servants and desired him to "wire" Billtock and Billtock to come to the Fifty-fourth street police court immediately.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the officer, in the young man's ear, evidently disposed to be very friendly, "but I know Billtock and Billtock like a book, and though they are nice men and good lawyers, and all that sort of thing, they ain't the party you want in this hyer case; you want a man that's got some 'pull' with the judge, you know. Kissing goes by favor, and so does law sometimes in a police court. Now, if you will let me recommend a friend, I can put you onto the best man in the city. This is criminal business, you know, and you don't want any real-estate lawyers to handle it."

Denby replied that he would be very much obliged indeed.

"Ned Purchase is the man for your money, then; there's no sharper criminal lawyer in this city, and he is square to the backbone, too; you can depend upon him every time!"

Denby quietly slipped a ten-dollar bill into the officer's hand, with the injunction to retain Mr. "Ned" Purchase as soon as possible.

Then, after bidding the servants take the best of care of the young lady, who was slowly reviving from her swoon, in company with the two officers the young man departed.

As the policeman had said, a carriage was at the door, and as the three descended the steps toward it, Doctor Fosdike came along.

"Hallo! what's the matter?" he inquired, suspecting at once from the appearance of things that some untoward accident had happened.

"I am arrested, doctor, charged with murder."

"Murder? Nonsense! What stupid mistake is this? Who have you been murdering?"

"My own mother."

The doctor started as if he had been shot.

"Good heavens! Why, this is absurd; but I will go with you at once; I am acquainted with the superintendent of police, gentlemen, and I am sure I will be able to convince him that this arrest is a mistake."

"The superintendent of police hasn't anything to do with it, sir," the officer remarked, respectfully. "In fact, he don't know anything more about it than you do. The warrant was sworn out in the Fifty-fourth street court."

"By whom?"

"I couldn't really say, sir," the policeman answered; he was a civil and obliging fellow—far superior to the common run.

"The warrant was given to us to execute, and that is all we know about it," explained the other officer, who was also a decent, civil man.

"Ah, I see; it is not the work of the detectives."

"No, sir; I think not, for in that case they would have made the arrest themselves and taken the prisoner to the Central Office."

"Oh, well, it is all right then!" cried the worthy doctor, with an air of relief, for a great weight indeed had been lifted from his mind. "It is some absurd mistake, of course; an examination will clear the whole thing up. Who sits in the Fifty-fourth street court?"

"Judge Himmilstein."

"That's lucky! I know him—have known him well for the last twenty years, ever since the time when he first started that little saloon on Third avenue that the police used to make so much fuss about. I've gone his bail a dozen times."

The policemen laughed, and then winked mysteriously at each other.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the big metropolitan, who had proved so obliging and good-natured, "but, if I was you, I wouldn't say anything about that little business of the saloon if you want to be of any use to this gentleman. The judge is a leetle touchy 'bout those things since he struck ile and got to the top of the heap, and it won't do a mite of good to rake up the old times when the police used to 'run him in' for keeping a low house."

"It wasn't his fault; he did the best he could to keep his customers quiet, and he couldn't help it because he was in an ugly district and the tough young fellows of the neighborhood used to select his saloon for a battleground."

"Well, go light on it, captain, for he don't like the record to be dug up."

"Much obliged; I will be governed by your advice," the doctor remarked. "Will the examination take place immediately?"

"No, sir; the judge is not on the bench now, and will have to be sent for; and that will probably take a couple of hours at the least."

"That will give me time to see the superintendent, then; I know he will be annoyed at this. Don't be downcast, Denby, my boy; you will come out all right; these little mistakes will happen once in a while, you know. I will be on hand for the examination," and then, with a parting shake of the hand, the good old doctor hurried away.

"That boy commit the murder?" he muttered, as he strode down the street—"pooh, nonsense! As well might I myself be accused of the deed."

The officers with their prisoner got into the carriage, and away they went for the Fifty-fourth street court.

As the officer had stated, the court was not in session when the party arrived there, so the prisoner was consigned to a cell until his Honor could be summoned.

The policeman had made a shrewd guess in regard to the opening of the court, for it was fully two hours before the magistrate arrived. He came lumbering into the court, very much out of breath.

Judge Himmilstein was one of those products which can only grow up and flourish in the free air of such a glorious republic as our own.

As a poor German lad he had come to this country, without a second shirt to his back; had graduated in a grocery store, then opened a saloon; from that to the proprietorship of a brewery was an easy step; made a fortune; then got into political life and studied for a lawyer, so as to wipe out the score on the slate of his early occupations.

He had been admitted to the bar, but had never practiced, nor wanted to; but, on the strength of being a "lawyer," he had managed to get elected to a police-judgeship.

He was a well-meaning old man, though woefully ignorant in many respects, yet wonderfully shrewd in others, and, despite the fact that he had been in this country since boyhood, he still spoke with a strong accent.

He took his seat upon the bench, looking, for all the world, with his jolly red face, flaxen hair and beard, like a god of lager, who had wandered by some mistake from the signboard of a saloon into the court-room.

"Order in der court!" he cried.

CHAPTER X.

CANARY'S IDEA.

A MORE dreadful position for a human being to be placed in can hardly be imagined. The girl was apparently in a state of total insensibility, unable to move either hand or foot, body and brain alike affected by the powerful narcotic administered in the coffee, yet, in reality, she was conscious of all that was going on around her, and, despite her innocence and want of knowledge of city ways, she understood what had transpired. She had been *drugged*; the benevolent-looking old man was one of those human wolves who prowl through the world disguised as lambs.

But why had she been selected for a victim? What was the object of this fiendish plot?

She was soon to learn.

As we have said, although apparently unconscious, she had a complete understanding of all that was said and done—could even see all that was passing around her.

As she sunk back in her chair, and relapsed slowly into the statue-like state produced by the drug, the benevolent look upon the face of the old man changed to a fiendish grin.

"Aha, Katy-did! I never saw your dear mamma's little drink work so beautifully before!" he exclaimed to the daughter. "Why, it is really miraculous! I hope that she hasn't made the dose so strong as to kill the girl, though. If such a thing as that were to happen, it would be mighty ugly for us. These infernal policemen haven't the highest possible opinion of me, and it would be just nuts to them to lay me by the heels on a charge of murder."

"Oh, you needn't be afraid of that, daddy!" the girl remarked. "You leave Mother Canary alone to put up the right dose. It isn't the first time she has fixed a sleeping draught."

And then the two looked at each other and laughed, the cruel sound seeming to sear the very brain of the young girl, so helpless in their power.

"Well, well, I suppose it is all right, but the girl weakened under it so quick I was afraid mebbe it was too strong."

"Shall I call mother?"

"Yes, tell her that everything is O. K."

The daughter soon returned with the old woman, and the hangdog-looking young man came slinking in behind her.

"Pretty quick work," the woman observed, with a fiendish smile, "but I reckoned that, as

she was young, strong and tough, she would need an extra dose, so I put in about half as much again as I usually do."

"But isn't there danger that you have given her too strong a dose?" inquired the old man, un-asily.

"Oh, no, not the slightest; in six or eight hours she will be all right again and none the worse for her soothing draught."

"But I say, father, what are you up to, anyway?" demanded the young man, stepping forward, and with a grin of admiration on his ugly features surveying the beautiful face of the victim.

"Up to something that concerns you more nearly than anybody," the father answered.

"Well, I reckoned you had some game afoot when you gave me the signal to hocus the gal," remarked the old woman, "but I don't exactly understand what you are driving at, for she don't look like a pigeon who would pay much for the plucking."

"Oh, you are right there, mother; I don't believe the girl has got many valuables; but I say, she's a beauty, ain't she?"

"Yes, she's good-looking enough."

"Nothing to brag on," added the daughter, spitefully, with a sideways glance in the mirror at her own homely face.

"Ain't got quite so handsome hair as yours, you pretty gazelle; and you beat her all to death on freckles," was the son's sarcastic sally.

The young lady favored him with a vicious look as she retorted:

"If I had such hair as you've got, I would go and drown myself, and as for freckles, you had better look at your own face."

"My lambs, you must not quarrel," interposed the elder Canary, "and least of all about this girl, who from this time forth will be one of our little family."

A grunt of surprise escaped the mother, and the son and daughter echoed it.

"It is a grand idea," old Canary continued, "and it came into my head when I got into conversation with her, on the train. Just think how useful we can make a young and beautiful girl like this, with her innocent look and ways."

"Oh, that is all foolishness!" Mother Canary exclaimed. "You will never be able to get such a girl as this to act as a decoy duck."

"My dear mother, I have accomplished some pretty difficult feats in my time, as the police records of three countries will testify, and I have thought of a little plan by which we can make this bird do our bidding, although of course it will take time. Our hopeful, here, needs a wife; he hasn't been the same man at all since he lost his girl by her being sent to State Prison for ten years, and from all accounts I reckon she will never come out alive, for they say she is dying of consumption. Now my little game is to call in our esteemed friend, the renowned Mr. Obediah Ketterwall, who is under a cloud just now, on account of some little money matters connected with his late occupation as justice of the peace, and have him tie the knot between our boy and this girl; then, when she is Joe's wife, it won't take us a very great while to break her into harness."

"Yes, yes, but isn't it taking a big risk?" asked the old woman, cautious and suspicious in all things.

"How so? Even if she does try to kick up a row after the thing is done, what good will it do her? Can't we all swear that she fell in love with our charming son at first sight, and wasn't content until a minister was summoned to unite them in the holy bonds of wedlock, and won't Ketterwall, in his sleek, butter-won't-melt-in-my-mouth way, take his oath that she did not object when he united her in marriage to this 'estimable young man?' and here the speaker imitated the canting tone of the disgraced minister of the law so cleverly that the rest could not avoid laughing.

"Yes, but won't her folks be apt to take up the matter and make it hot for us?"

"Not the slightest danger of that, mother," assured the old scamp, with a sly chuckle. "She is an orphan, and hasn't any relatives. You see, I put her through her paces on the cars in regard to that, and she was so close-mouthed about it, too, that I have got the idea there is something wrong about her. She didn't have any baggage, not even a hand-bag, and that's a very suspicious circumstance, for girls as well-dressed and ladylike-looking as this one don't generally go out into the world to seek their fortune absolutely empty-handed. I have an idea that she is running away; and, maybe, there is some good reason for her getting out. If that is so, she will not kick up much of a fuss when she finds we have got her in our clutches."

The rest nodded; this was good, sound reasoning.

"S'pose I go through her pockets, father?" the girl suggested. "Perhaps she may have some letter, or something that will tell us about her."

"You are my own gentle child!" the old rascal responded, patnetically; "that suggestion to

'go through her' proves that you are a chip of the old block."

"Help me put her on the bed, Slinky," ordered the girl. By this well-befitting appellation the young man was known among his associates.

He obeyed, and after the insensible form was placed upon the bed, with skill born of experience—for the girl, despite her youth, was a pickpocket of the first degree—this notorious daughter of a still more notorious sire examined the victim's person and produced her treasures.

From the pocket in her dress came the well-worn wallet, and from her bosom the letter from her lover which she cherished so carefully.

"Not much of a haul," the old man observed, as he examined the contents of the wallet and displayed upon the table the scanty store of money which it contained. "She was honest with me, though, for she gave me to understand that she was not well-fixed, financially. Well, we don't want that; it isn't worth taking," and he commenced to put the money back into the wallet again, but the daughter interrupted him.

"Say, father, what do you want to do that for?" she protested.

"Well, why not?"

"S'pose she cuts up ugly when she finds out she is in a trap and goes to walk her chalks, won't it be mighty handy to have that little change in her pocket?"

"Exactly—exactly; you are quite right, and I will take care of it, although I reckon she ain't going to have a chance to get out, if I know myself," the old man remarked, pocketing the money.

The letter was then examined; it was the brief note which the girl had received from her lover, and this at once gave this precious family an idea of why she had come to New York.

"I'll take care of this," said the old man; "there is no telling but what it will prove useful one of these days," and he carefully stowed the letter away in his capacious pocketbook.

"And now, sonny," he continued, "run for the justice and we'll have you joined to this beauty in no time, and that is the kind of man I am!"

CHAPTER XI.

A MIRACLE.

THE young man, after a gloating look at the beautiful girl who was so soon to become his victim, departed.

"We'll darken the room by closing the blinds when the justice comes, and you two can hold the girl up between you, so that if our dear brother ever has to give any evidence about the matter, he can do so with a clear conscience," old Canary observed. "And now, since the girl is all right and won't need any attention until Slinky and the justice get back, I'll trouble you two to carry those things down-stairs, so that I can make a decent breakfast."

The women proceeded to comply with the request, when there was a crash and a bang against the wall that fairly seemed to shake the house.

"Confound the fellows!" exclaimed Canary, "they'll knock the whole side of the house in with their carelessness. I think they are all drunk two-thirds of the time."

The three at once quitted the apartment, never even taking the trouble to cast a parting glance at the girl, so completely satisfied were they that the potent drug would bind her as though she was fettered by an iron chain.

And poor Helen, in her enforced slumber, comprehended all that had passed. She understood that she was in the hands of wretches as cruel and merciless as any painted savages of the Western wilds. A miracle alone could save her.

And the miracle came!

The very precaution which Mother Canary had taken to increase the dose which she usually gave, defeated the purpose for which it was intended; instead of throwing the girl into a deep, stupor-like sleep, to continue seven or eight hours, it induced a sort of catalepsy, which a violent exertion of the will, and the excitement of her perilous position quickly began to conquer.

Little by little she recovered consciousness; the color came back to her lips and cheeks, the brightness to her eyes, and the strength to her limbs.

She rose, with feeble action, to a sitting posture, then gained the floor and half-staggered to a chair. She was still weak and her steps uncertain.

What was she to do?

The terrible vampires, into whose hands she had fallen, were liable to return at any moment, and how could she escape them?

In agony of mind she pressed her hands to her throbbing temples, her head aching as if it would burst.

"The door is unlocked, but if I attempt to reach the street will I not be discovered before I can do so?"

Her heart sunk as she reflected that these monsters had robbed her of all her scanty store of

money, and that, if she succeeded in getting out, she could only roam the streets, penniless and friendless.

But anything was better than remaining to become their victim, and every time she thought of being made the bride of the evil-looking, snake-like son of the old man-shark, a chill of horror pervaded her frame.

"At any risk I must try it!" she exclaimed, rising to her feet, and putting on her hat and cloak.

So confident had been the vultures that their victim was completely in their power, they had not taken the trouble to remove her outward garments, or even to lock the door.

Two ideas only were in the girl's mind; first to get out of the house as soon as possible, and then to make her way to the meeting-place appointed by her lover in his letter.

"I will find the obelisk and wait there until he comes," she murmured, as she opened the door and peered out into the entry.

All was still; as far as noise was concerned there did not seem to be a soul in the house.

"I must venture," she decided.

But just as she stepped over the threshold—ignorant of the fact that not only was the front door below securely locked and the keys in Mrs. Canary's pocket, but the old woman's pet dog always was roaming about the lower part of the house, and the moment she set foot upon the stairs his barking would surely give the alarm—there was a terrible crash, and nearly one-half of the side-wall, against which the bed from which she had just arisen, was placed, came tumbling in upon that piece of furniture, crushing it to the floor!

A shudder passed through the girl's frame as she reflected upon the horrible death which she most surely would have met if she had remained upon the bed.

The careless workmen had loosened the heavy old-fashioned chimney, and in its fall it had crushed through the side of the house.

Here was an avenue of escape open, and like a flash the thought came to her mind that a kind Heaven was watching over her.

She closed the door quickly; ran to the great hole in the wall, and passed through into the other house.

"They will surely believe that I am buried under the bricks with the ruins of the bed," she murmured, as she descended to the street "and will never dream that I have escaped until the mass is removed."

And the surmise was correct. The shock of the falling wall of course alarmed the Canary family, who all came rushing up-stairs, eager to see what damage had been done, and when they entered the room and beheld the nature of the calamity they immediately decided that the girl was underneath the bricks and at once set to work to dig her out, but with little expectation that she would be found alive.

It can be surmised that great were the amazement and disgust of these human birds of prey when, after half an hour's hard work, they discovered that their victim had escaped an awful death, and was not to be seen.

The girl's escape seemed miraculous, but none the less they did not waste time in meditating over the matter, but at once set out to trace the fugitive.

In this, however, they were not fortunate; the girl had gained the street without attracting notice, and not the slightest clew to her course was discovered; and baffled and apprehensive, the Canary tribe returned to their thieves' den to curse their ill-luck.

Once in the street, Helen had turned to the right, and hurried along, at the first corner she went into the cross street; kept on that for three blocks and then turned again, thus hoping to evade pursuit.

A total stranger to this part of the city, she had no idea where she was going, but cared not for that so long as she could get beyond the reach of pursuers; that once assured she would inquire her way to the obelisk, and go there in the hope of meeting the man she loved so dearly.

From the first policeman she met she inquired her way. He happened to be a civil fellow, and although rather amused at the inquiry, as being proof of "greenness," took the trouble to direct her so that she could not possibly miss the way.

"The next street is Broadway; turn to your left hand when you get there and go along it for forty minutes' walk until you come to Fifth avenue; that will be at Madison Square where it crosses Broadway; then go up Fifth avenue till you come to the obelisk, which is in Central Park. I don't exactly remember what street it is near, but it is somewhere around Eightieth, I believe. Anyhow, anybody will tell you when you get to the Park. It's a good long walk, miss, four or five miles, at the least."

"Thank you, sir; I am used to walking and shall not mind it."

Then she hurried on, and at last reached the spot, terribly tired and almost ready to faint, for the powerful drug which she had taken sensibly affected her general strength.

It had taken her so long a time, in her weak state, to reach the obelisk, that she did not have

many minutes to wait until the noon hour arrived.

She climbed the little mound upon which stands the grim old Egyptian column—which for centuries has looked down upon poor, frail humanity with sublime indifference and stony scorn—passed around to its front, and going to the edge of the elevation looked down upon the drive beneath and then over at Fifth avenue.

But no signs of the manly form of the handsome fellow who had won her heart could she see.

Fifth avenue in the vicinity of the obelisk is not yet built up, and the view is not inviting. About the only thing in the neighborhood worth looking at was a magnificent mansion a few blocks down the street, which so far surpassed any house which she had ever seen that poor Helen could not resist gazing upon it with curious eyes, and speculating how happy the fortunate people must be who lived within, able to enjoy such luxury.

Some ten minutes she remained motionless, engaged in these idle speculations; then retracing her steps she followed the winding path down the side of the mound, through the tunnel under the driveway; then up again to the level of the road, and on until she came around to the front of the obelisk, where, for the accommodation of visitors, some half a dozen benches are placed.

Tired and faint the girl sunk upon one of the benches. This was the place where she was to wait.

And wait there she did until the afternoon wore away, and the dusky of twilight was succeeded by the gloom of the night.

Yet her lover came not.

Some of the passers-by regarded her with curious eyes, for she was so beautiful and yet looking so ill; hunger's pang was now gnawing at her vitals, and she was so faint that she could hardly stand or sit.

One of the park policemen, too, had had his eyes upon her for some time, but she was so quiet, so lady-like, that he hesitated to question her.

The moon came up and shone out bright, bathing the relic of a far-off age with its mellow light, caressing it with its beams as it had done for years in the mystic land of the old, old East, the cradle of civilization.

Helen felt that she must make an attempt to shake off this faintness that was creeping over her and sapping the vigor of every limb; but she was so faint with hunger and exhaustion that when she arose she could hardly stand and was obliged to grasp the back of the bench to keep from falling.

"Oh, my heavens! I believe that I am dying!" she cried, in agony. "I must have food or I shall faint. I have no money—those wretches robbed me of everything, but I must have food! Shall I beg, then—beg from the first passer-by and ask for a few cents to keep the life within my body? Oh, mother in heaven! thou dear, dead mother whom I have never known, who perhaps gave her life for me, look down now and aid thy child in her unfortunate extremity!"

But in answer to this prayer, instead of a white-robed spirit descending the golden stairs from the other world, there came a rude and rough mortal, a gray-coated park policeman.

"See here, what on earth is the matter with you?" he asked, roughly, after the fashion of his kind, placing his hand upon the shoulder of the shrinking girl, while the old comrades, the moon and the obelisk, seemed to look down in curiosity upon the strange picture.

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE COURT-ROOM.

"ORDER in der court!" repeated the judge, bringing his fat fist down with an emphatic whack upon the desk before him, for which there was no necessity, for the apartment was as still as a graveyard, but this was his Honor's way to impress the bystanders with a proper sense of his court's dignity.

The prisoner was brought in, but, as it happened, neither his lawyer, "Ned" Purchase, nor the doctor had arrived.

"What is der charge?" asked the judge, beaming mildly on the prisoner when he discovered he was a well dressed, gentlemanly-looking man; a good suit of clothes and a prepossessing appearance went a long way with Himmelstein, who, like most men who have had the good fortune to rise from a very low condition of life, never forgot the early respect which had been instilled into him for those born with golden spoons in their mouths.

"Murder," responded the officer.

The judge pricked up his ears.

"Aha! dat ish a serious matter. Who ish it dat has been murdered?"

"Mrs. Matilda Plantagenet, of Fifth avenue."

"Ah, yes, yes, I read dat over in der newspapers," and now the judge scowled at the prisoner.

The idea of any one daring to murder a woman worth four or five millions of dollars was perfectly horrible.

"Vat have you to say, my mans, hey?"

"I am innocent of the charge, and the accusation is perfectly ridiculous."

"Ah, yes; mein gracious, yes; dat ish w'at dey all say. Vell, we will broceed in der regular order."

Then the name, age, etc., of the prisoner were asked, and the examination began.

The witness who had sworn out the warrant upon which the young man had been arrested took the stand, and, to Denby's intense surprise, he discovered that the fellow was his late mother's coachman—a man whom he had never liked for his appearance was not prepossessing. He was an Englishman, middle-aged, built head, and with a sober, sanctimonious air, which had always prejudiced the young man against him.

After the usual formalities he proceeded to tell his story, which was as follows:

"I was Mrs. Plantagenet's coachman, and being well aware that a bad feeling had for some time existed between the lady and her son—"

Here the judge broke in; what had "der son" got to do with the matter? The witness must not bring in "der whole family."

"Way, Mr. Denby Livingstone is Mrs. Plantagenet's son!" the man blurted out.

The judge fairly gasped with amazement.

"Der tuyfel!" he muttered, under the shade of his huge and bristly mustache. This was a murder case with a vengeance!

The witness continued:

"I knew that they were not on good terms, and on the night of the murder, early in the evening as I passed the parlor, going up-stairs to my room, the door being ajar, I overheard the prisoner threaten his mother—"

"That is an infernal lie!" cried the young man, unable to restrain his righteous indignation.

"Order in der court!" fairly howled the judge, who always became fearfully excited when he imagined the decorum of his court was infringed upon.

"Order! order!" repeated the policeman.

"This is a court of law, young mans. You make noise and disturb der court again I fine you ten tollars."

At this moment Dr. Fosdike and the superintendent of police entered.

The judge recognized the two immediately, and invited them to a seat upon the bench by his side.

"Murder case," he said to the superintendent. "Dis young mans is charged mit killing his mother."

"Not much!" observed the superintendent, in his blunt way.

"The charge is absurd; that young man is worth five millions of dollars," remarked the doctor, who, shrewdly gauging the judge by what he knew of him of old, rightly calculated that the announcement would astound Himmelstein.

And it did; he was worth fifty or sixty thousand dollars himself, and he regarded it as a colossal sum, but the idea of five millions completely took his breath away.

"Five million! der tuyfel!" he muttered.

Just then Ned Purchase entered the courtroom, and the officer, who had shown himself so friendly to the prisoner, the moment he caught sight of Purchase leaned over toward Denby and whispered:

"Here's Ned now; you're all right! He'll turn this fellow inside out in a twinkling."

The lawyer advanced directly to the prisoner and Denby surveyed him with considerable curiosity.

Ned Purchase was one of the noted characters of great Gotham.

A man about forty, a little above the medium size, and splendidly built, his story is worth telling. As a young man he had been thrown, by the chance of fortune among a rough class, had become a boxer and fought some of the longest and most severe battles known to the prize-ring; then, aspiring to better things, studied for the law, graduated with honor and had built up one of the best criminal practices in New York. Really a man of great natural talents, speaking three or four languages, possessing an easy, polished style of oratory—if he had not been especially talented he never would have risen from the low conditions of his early life.

"Mr. Purchase, Mr. Livingstone," introduced the friendly policeman. "I sent for you, Ned, at the request of this gentleman, who is in a little trouble," the officer explained.

The lawyer shook hands with his client, whom his experienced eyes at once detected to be a "swell," expressed his pleasure at making his acquaintance and asked about the trouble.

"Something serious, I presume, for I see the superintendent on the bench with the judge," he added.

The officer in a few words hastened to place the history of the case before him.

"Humph!" ejaculated the lawyer, when he had learned the particulars; "rather a serious thing to go ahead on the evidence of one man, unless, indeed, he had witnessed the murder with his own eyes or has some other proof of equal weight. When he gets through I will take hold of him and see what he is made of."

And, although he did not say so, yet in his mind was the idea that, if the witness did know anything about the murder, more than likely his knowledge came from being either a principal in the crime or an accessory.

Meanwhile, on the bench, the superintendent had been giving the judge his views of the matter.

"The doctor came down for me when he heard of this arrest, because he knew I was interested in the case," the chief exclaimed. "You see, I've had two of my best men working on this job ever since the murder took place, and from the way this fellow looks now I feel pretty well satisfied that this gentleman I ain't anything to do with it. I was annoyed, first, when I heard of this arrest, but now that I think the matter over carefully, I don't know but what it will work to my advantage."

"Ya, ya," muttered the judge, in an absent sort of way. "Five millions! oh, dat ish big monish," he continued to himself, hardly able to take his eyes off the prisoner.

"Please your Honor, I appear for the prisoner," announced the lawyer, perceiving that affairs were now in a train to move forward.

The judge nodded, and the examination proceeded.

In substance the witness testified that he had heard loud words between the prisoner and his mother, and threats made by the former against the latter, although his memory was not good enough for him to repeat the words, or tell exactly what they were, but the language was threatening, he was sure of that; then, meditating over the matter, he had gone up-stairs and retired to rest. He had been awakened by the shrieks of the murdered woman, although, before he perceived the drift of the lawyer's questions, he had admitted that his room was "way up at the top of the house, and that he had closed and locked the door before going to bed; and in coming down-stairs, as he passed by Mr. Denby's room, in the dusky gloom which enshrouded the entry, he fancied that he saw a dark form, a man apparently, dart into the apartment and close the door. In regard to the figure he would not like to swear positively, for the entry was so dark that his eyes might have deceived him, but there was one thing of which he was certain and that was, as he passed the door of Mr. Denby's apartment, he distinctly heard the key turn in the lock within, and, thinking the gentleman was about to come out, he halted so as to have company going down-stairs, but Mr. Denby did not make his appearance, so, arriving at the conclusion that the figure he had seen, entering the room, was that of Mr. Livingstone, and the sound he had heard was the key turning in the lock as he fastened the door after him, he went on his way, and was one of the first to come to the aid of the wounded woman.

He had been present when the doctor arrived, and when she revived under his care the words she uttered recalled to his mind the mysterious figure in the entry which had fled into Mr. Denby's room with noiseless steps.

To the direct question as to what these words were the man was unable to say, for, as he explained, he had a very poor memory, and he could not carry such things in his head, but the purport of the speech was that it was Mr. Denby who had hurt her, and she wondered how he could do it, seeing that she was his mother, and that she had never injured him.

Then the doctor had ordered the room to be cleared, saying that Mrs. Plantagenet was becoming delirious, but, for his part, he didn't put any faith in that statement, and he thought the doctor, anxious to screen the young man, was eager to get the witnesses out of the room before the injured woman could still further denounce her son.

When he heard the story told by Mrs. Plantagenet in regard to how she came by her injuries, of the masked man who had entered the apartment and opened the safe, then made his escape after grappling with her, particularly when it was said that neither money nor jewelry had been taken, he felt perfectly sure that it was Mrs. Plantagenet's son who was the intruder, and that he had come in search of some private papers, a will perhaps, disinheriting him, as he had heard Mrs. Plantagenet threaten early in the evening.

The lawyer here interjected a sly remark in regard to the wonderful amount of knowledge possessed by the witness of the private affairs of the house whose head he served.

"I only keep my eyes and ears open, that's all," replied the witness, sullenly. He didn't relish the lawyer's questions; he was evidently afraid of getting into some trap, and he weighed every word carefully before he uttered it. In fact, he seemed entirely too much on his guard for an honest witness who only desired to tell the truth.

From that time forth, continued the man, he had suspected that Mr. Denby was the masked intruder; and then, too, the young man had not been alarmed by the screams of the injured woman as was every one else in the house, and did not leave his room until summoned on account of his mother's illness.

The man said, frankly, he had made up his mind that Mr. Livingstone was the guilty man,

and he had determined to fasten the crime upon him if possible and so avenge the death of his mistress. He was certain of this when it was ascertained that Mrs. Plantagenet had not made any will, because he distinctly heard her say to Mr. Denby, when they were quarreling, that she had made a will and cut him off with a few hundred dollars.

Here was a motive for the crime; to get at and destroy the will which made him a beggar.

Now, to the rather obtuse mind of the judge this didn't seem to be much evidence against a man worth five millions, and when the lawyer, after reviewing the matter, claimed that the evidence did not warrant the holding of the prisoner, but still was willing to give bonds to any amount until the papers could be sent to the grand jury, the judge, with due gravity, thought that a bond for five thousand would be sufficient; a thousand to each million, you'll observe.

And, to the disgust of the witness, the lawyer demanded that he be detained or find surety for his appearance.

So the witness was held on a thousand dollars bail, and not being able to furnish it, was marched off to the House of Detention, while Denby left the court with his friends in triumph; and this is *law* in New York.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN AGREEMENT.

THE inmates of the Plantagenet Mansion had been terribly excited by the arrest of the young master.

Mr. Richard Plantagenet had been absent when the arrest had taken place, but came in some ten minutes after the carriage which contained the officers and their prisoner had driven away.

Viola, in great agitation, informed him of what had transpired, but he made light of the matter as a good joke.

"My dear girl, you must not worry yourself about it," he observed, comfortably bestowing himself in an easy-chair and drawing it up to the window so that he could look out on the street.

The twain were in the front parlor.

"Not worry myself?" cried the young lady, in amazement, pacing up and down the room, like a caged wild animal, so excited that she could not keep still. "It is easy enough to give such advice, but not so easy to follow it. But you are a regular icicle; nothing seems to affect you; I believe that if an earthquake were to destroy half the city you wouldn't be astonished by it."

"That depends upon which half it was," he replied, languidly.

"I can't keep quiet and poor dear Denby dragged off by those horrid brutes!"

"Really, did they drag him off? He should have known better than resist the officers; under the circumstances, if they had come for me, I should have gone as quietly as a lamb."

"Oh, you are perfectly horrid! You know what I mean. Of course they didn't actually drag him, and I suppose they acted as gentlemanly as they could; I believe they didn't even use handcuffs."

"Probably not; they rarely handcuff men of the Denby stamp, even when charged with so serious a crime as murder. It is only your poor devil, without friends, who knows what it is to feel the touch of the bracelets."

"How easy you seem to feel about the matter; but still, I might have expected it would not trouble you, for I know there never was any love lost between you two."

"And a great deal lost between you and him, eh?" Richard retorted.

A slight flush rose in the girl's cheeks.

"It isn't any one's business whether there is or not, and I am obliged to seek a father confessor or you are not the man whom I shall choose for the office."

"Now, in answer to your insinuation, I will say that I do not bear the least ill-will to Mr. Denby Livingstone, and, although I know he does not like me, that is his fault and not mine. I have never injured him in any way, and I challenge you to dispute that statement, sweet cousin!"

"Well, as far as I know, you never have," the girl admitted. "But Denby had an idea that you interfered between his mother and him—"

"And that was on your account, so he believed, and therefore if I was the agent you were the principal."

Again the girl's face reddened and she stamped her little foot impatiently.

"I'm sure I never asked you to interfere."

"No, nor anybody else, nor did I interfere; that was all pure imagination on Denby's part. He is nothing but a boy, willful and obstinate. He quarreled with his mother because she presumed to dare to find a wife for him, and after the quarrel took place, naturally, the management of Mrs. Plantagenet's affairs fell into my hands, as there wasn't any one else to look after them. That irritated my gentleman, and he did his best to make things disagreeable for me, but

I went calmly on in my way, without paying the slightest attention to him. And when, in a passion, he quitted the house, at his mother's request, I put private detectives on his track so as to see what he was up to. By the by, did Mrs. Plantagenet ever tell you what the detectives discovered?"

The girl shook her head.

"They were cunning fellows, and they followed him like bloodhounds. At last they tracked him to a certain little town, and there discovered that he had a love affair with a common, low kind of a girl, who lived in a miserable shanty, with an old drunken father, a couple of miles from the village. And even this girl he was deceiving, for he was passing under a false name, disguised as a sort of adventurer or artist, so the girl hadn't the slightest suspicion as to who he really was. That was honorable, wasn't it? luring this girl into a fool's paradise, meaning all the time to desert her when he got tired of her, just as a child casts away a toy when wearied of it!"

"Oh, no, no!" cried Viola, impetuously. "He truly loves this girl, I am sure of it! for he told me only to-day that now he was free to marry the woman he loved; and he further said he had won her when she thought he was only a poor wandering artist, but now he could place his country pearl in a setting which she would adorn; those were his very words."

"Well, it is possible, of course, that he meant to be honest with his 'pearl' all the time, and if so, he is a bigger fool than I took him to be, for the girl is one of these common, ignorant, creatures, though rather good-looking, I believe, who is only fit to be the wife of a day laborer, whose sole ambition in this world is to get enough to eat and drink. But, just after the detectives got on his track, by some incautious movement on their part, he discovered that he was being watched, and coming in contact with one of them he allowed his temper to get the better of his judgment, after his usual fashion, and gave the fellow a sound thrashing. Of course the detective, smarting over his bruises, swore out a warrant for him, and Mr. Denby was obliged to run away, and just how he managed to escape the officers, who were searching for him, is a wonder. Anyway, in some mysterious manner, he evaded the search, disappeared, and the girl also quitted her home that same evening, and has not been either seen or heard of since. The supposition is that they went off together, although, in spite of a diligent watch, I have not been able to discover that she is in the city or in communication with him."

"He did not speak as if she was here."

"Well, she may have only been fooling with him and gone off with some other lover. But now, in regard to my taking this arrest so calmly, since I am put upon the defensive and driven to explain my acts—Denby is not in the slightest danger, even though he is the criminal; a man with five millions of dollars at his back cannot be very easily convicted of murder in New York to-day, unless the proofs against him are so strong that there is not a shadow of a doubt about the case. In this matter, from the circumstances of the affair, there cannot be any absolute proofs, so you may rest easy; he isn't in any danger, although it may cost him a small fortune to get out of the scrape."

"Why should it?" the girl asked, annoyed. "Surely he ought to be able to make his innocence manifest at once."

"That is not always so easily accomplished. You must remember that circumstances bear strongly against him."

"I do not comprehend how that can be."

And the girl drew up a chair and sat down, facing her cousin.

"It is perfectly plain when you come to look into it. No one in this world had any interest in Mrs. Plantagenet's death but her son, no one had any reason to go to that safe, abstract papers and leave the valuables but Denby Livingstone. He inherited his mother's property; as there was no will left by her he was her sole heir. But, there was a will—a will made by Mrs. Plantagenet when she learned that her son had disgraced himself with this country girl, and in that will, after leaving one-half her fortune to various charitable societies, the rest was divided between you and me, with the exception of fifty thousand dollars' worth of Chemical Bank stock, which was bequeathed in trust to Denby's grandchildren, he and his children to have the interest only; she tied the money up as long as the law would allow. That will was duly executed on the very afternoon of the day on which she was wounded, and that will is not to be found! Now then, who had any interest, besides Denby Livingstone, in suppressing this will?"

The girl was astounded, but she felt sure there must be some mistake about the matter; she could not bring herself to believe that Denby could be guilty of such a crime.

"You do not believe that he had anything to do with the affair?" he remarked, reading her thoughts in her face.

"No, I cannot bring myself to believe it."

"Mind, I do not say that Denby himself committed the crime, for I think he is too shrewd to

risk being caught, but I do believe he employed some one else."

"I do not—I will not believe it! Why, Richard, Denby is too noble and generous to commit such a base act. He told me only to-day that he had determined to do for us as he felt sure his mother would have done had she lived."

"And what was that, pray?"

"Make us a present of one hundred thousand apiece."

"He is generous!" the other remarked, with a slight sneer. "If the will had come to light we would have had a million apiece and he nothing but the interest on fifty thousand, about enough to keep from starving."

"Oh, I don't know what to think; I do love this beautiful home so dearly," she confessed. "And that was the reason why I was willing to marry Denby when his mother asked me, for I didn't care anything for him in a fond, loving way. In fact, I don't believe I shall ever fall in love with anybody—the kind of love, you know, that we read about."

"And if I had a fortune, say a million or so, would you marry me?" asked Richard, leaning forward and taking her hand.

"Yes; if you wanted me, for I like you as well as I do anybody; but you are only joking!"

"Never was more earnest in my life, for I love you, love you dearly, and years ago I determined to win you, and now I tell you before a year is over I'll be rich, Denby will be ruined, and you shall be my bride if you are willing. Is it a bargain?"

She smiled consent, and he sealed the compact with a kiss.

CHAPTER XIV.

HELEN FINDS A FRIEND.

THE girl shrank in terror from the burly policeman, although the man's tones were not unkind; but he was a great, gruff fellow, and couldn't appear amiable, no matter how hard he tried.

He had had his eyes upon the girl for a long time, for she had attracted his attention by remaining so quietly in the one spot, and every now and then gazing around her with a wistful look as though she expected some one.

At first the officer had taken it to be one of those little romantic episodes so common to all public parks; a girl who is not able to receive her lover at her own home, by reason of hard-hearted parents, or some other obstacle of a like nature, makes an appointment to meet him at a certain place in the Park, and while waiting is on pins and needles, figuratively speaking, until he appears.

Of course it isn't any business of the Park officials to interfere as long as the pair behave themselves, nor can anything be said, with a good grace, if a visitor takes it into his or her head to remain in one place for five or six hours, provided that they are decent and respectable and do not disturb any one else.

But the signs of suffering so visible in the face of the girl interested the officer, and he had been watching for some time, determined to speak to her if he got a good chance.

So when he saw her rise, and then stagger, weak through faintness, he came up to her immediately.

At a glance Helen caught sight of his uniform, comprehended he was an officer, and, instantly, thoughts of the burly stranger who had threatened her so loudly down in the country flashed across her mind.

She was about to be arrested, and no doubt he lurked somewhere in the background.

"Oh, for Heaven's sake let me go!" she exclaimed, wildly. "I have never injured any one in all my life!"

She assayed to step forward, but she was so weak, unnerved and trembling with excitement that, had it not been for the support which the policeman instantly afforded her with his arm, she would most surely have fallen to the ground.

"Don't be alarmed, miss; I ain't a-going to hurt you; but, I say, what on earth is the matter with you? Why, you ain't hardly got strength to stand!"

"You won't arrest me?" the girl asked, with trembling lips, so unnerved by thoughts of the danger which she thought threatened her that she hardly knew what she was saying.

"Lord love yer heart, my dear, I ain't got no call to arrest you that I knows on; but what is the matter? Are you sick?"

"I am not well."

"No, I reckon you ain't; you are as white as a ghost! I've had my peepers on you for some time, seeing you sitting here all alone, and I was a-thinking of speaking to you long ago; but I ain't a very forward chap, and I never likes to interfere in other people's business, but when I see'd that you could hardly walk I thought it 'bout time to put my oar in."

"I think I am better now."

And she made an effort to walk with the support of his arm, but had not the strength she thought, and he was obliged again to steady her.

"Now, miss, take a friend's advice and don't

try that ag'in; you can't do it; you ain't got the strength—you're sick—I kin see plain enough in your face that you are sick, but, Lord bless you! you don't look half as sick as you really are!"

"No, no; I am not really sick; I am only weak and faint for lack of food," she murmured, the confession escaping from her almost before she knew it.

"What, hungry?" exclaimed the officer, in profound astonishment, for as the girl was well-dressed and refined-looking, he had never thought of any such thing.

"Yes, sir; I have not tasted food since morning."

"Blazes you haven't!"

The policeman was so amazed that he could hardly find words to express his feelings.

"And, then, I only had about half a cup of coffee."

"Nice, solid kind of food that is to wrestle with for a whole day!"

"I felt faint while sitting on the bench, but I had no idea I was so weak until I got up and tried to walk."

"The gal will die before I can get her down to the arsenal unless I can give her something to brace her up a leetle," the policeman thought, taking a good look around.

"There ain't a soul in sight, and I reckon I can risk it," he continued.

Then he took a small flask from his pocket.

"Say, miss, I've got a leetle drop of whisky here, and if you take a swallow or two it will help you to keep up for awhile. Don't say anything, you know, to anybody that I give it to you, 'cos it might make trouble for me."

Hardly knowing what she did, the girl took a good swallow of the potent liquor from the flask of the kind-hearted policeman, and the stimulant seemed to put new life into her upon the instant.

"Aha!" exclaimed the officer, perceiving that the cordial had been of use, "that is the kind of stuff to make a man's hair curl!"

And he took a sly sip of the whisky himself, then returned the flask to his pocket with another careful glance around.

"Whisky of the right kind is as good as meat and drink sometimes, with a suit of clothes thrown in."

"It seems to make me feel better."

"You'll be able to get home now, miss, I suppose?"

"Home?"

And melancholy indeed was the way in which she pronounced the word.

"Yes; I s'pose you have got a home, somewhere?"

"No, I have not."

"Well, that's rough! But you've got friends?"

"Only one, and I have been waiting here all day expecting to see him, for he was to come to me here in front of the obelisk."

So faint and dispirited was the girl that she did not attempt concealment of the motive which had induced her to remain in the Park all day long.

A low whistle escaped from the lips of the bluff officer, who had become deeply interested in the unfortunate maiden.

It was the same old story, he thought—the tale which begins with vows of love and eternal fidelity, and winds up with desertion, disgrace and death.

"And he didn't come?" the man asked, gently, a suspicious huskiness in his voice.

He was a married man with a little family, and his eldest, a girl about ten years old, was beginning to show signs of blossoming into a veritable beauty; in his imagination he thought that in the event of anything happening to him, his child might some day come and wander around the Park, waiting with a sick heart for the lover who never comes.

"No, sir."

"What time did you expect to meet him?"

"Between twelve and one."

"And it's 'bout eight now!" cried the "cop," with a guttural exclamation—a cross between an oath and a groan. "Don't you know where he lives?"

"No, sir."

"Well, do you live in the city?"

"No, sir; I have just come from the country."

The officer was sure now that his surmise was correct, and that the maid was one who had loved "not wisely, but too well."

"Can't you go back to your friends in the country?"

Go back! thought Helen—go back to fall into the hands of that coarse and brutal stranger who was pursuing her as though she was a criminal, guilty of murder! No, she had rather die.

"I have no friends to whom to go; I am all alone in the world!"

"This is about as rough as they make 'em!" the policeman muttered. "Mighty hard lines, miss, but if you've got a leetle money, you will be able to find shelter somewhere until you kin get time to turn 'round."

"I have not a penny in the world; I fell into the hands of some wretched people this morning

when I came to the city, and they robbed me of everything I had; it was not much, but it would have kept me for a week or two until I could have found employment."

"No home, no friends and no money!" the officer murmured. "What on earth is she to do?"

And then, as he pondered over the sad story, an idea came into his head. The girl had spoken in such a dull, listless way—due to the potency of the strong liquor which she had swallowed—that it seemed as if her mind was affected, and the policeman had come to the conclusion that her troubles had upset her mental balance; so his thoughts ran:

"A leetle off her nut, I reckon, and perhaps the best thing I can do for her is to 'run her in,' where she will be taken care of; it won't do to let her wander round the city in this hyer condition, 'cos if she don't fall into bad hands and isn't taken to some den, she will be mighty apt to find her way to the river and make a hole in the water; then there'll be another item for the newspapers. 'Beautiful girl found drowned, and nobody knows nothing about her.'"

"Say, miss," he said, to the girl, "I guess you had better come along with me. I'll take you down to the arsenal to the sergeant and he will be able to do something for you. You can't stay here all night, you know, and if you haven't any place to go, I don't see what else you can do. And you have got to have something to eat, you know, or you will die; you can't go on in this way."

"No, I suppose not," she replied, hardly knowing what she was saying, for the fumes of the liquor had now mounted to her head and her brain was terribly confused.

"Take my arm and come along; the quicker you get a good square meal into you the better."

Helen went with the man willingly enough, for she did not for an instant imagine that she was under arrest.

But such was the fact, and the policeman took her straight to his head-quarters, the arsenal, where, behind a desk, sat an officer whose general appearance was extremely unprepossessing.

"Hallo, what's 'this?'" he exclaimed, as the policeman conducted the girl to the front of the desk and then retired to one side.

Helen surveyed the sergeant anxiously, for the gruff tones struck a chill to her heart.

CHAPTER XV.

BEFORE THE JUDGE.

IN the Park policeman the unfortunate girl had found a friend, the man at the arsenal turned out to be a different sort of fellow entirely. He was not the officer usually in charge, but a stranger put in his place for a few days.

"A knave dressed up in brief authority."

To him the beautiful country girl was but a common creature, a little the worse for liquor, and, perhaps, somewhat weak in mind, who was to be disposed of as soon as possible.

To the officer's kindly tale he turned a deaf ear. He could not be imposed upon by any improbable story. "Nothing to eat," when it was plainly to be seen that she had had something to drink, and the unhappy officer did not dare confess that he had given the girl a sup of liquor for fear she might faint on his hands.

"Take her over to the Fifty-seventh street court and give her in charge as a vagrant found wandering about the Park!" cried the official, sternly, and as the harsh sentence did not seem to affect her the self-important man in authority was satisfied his impression of her character and condition was quite correct.

There was no help for it, and with a muttered imprecation upon the head of the official brute, the officer departed with his prisoner, and took her to the Fifty-seventh street court, but tarried on the way at a little eating saloon, where he insisted upon his charge taking an oyster stew and drinking a cup of coffee; a proceeding which wonderfully revived her.

He tried to soften the matter down as much as possible.

"The boss was rather cranky to-night," he explained. "I don't know much about him, but from what I've seen I think he is the most obstinate man when he gets an idea into his head that I ever ran across. But, after all, perhaps it is the best thing for you. You won't have to sleep out in the streets, and when morning comes you'll feel all right. Here's a couple of dollars to help you along. You'd be welcome to more, but it's all I've got."

The girl's heart was touched by this kindness, and she protested she could not take the money.

"Oh, it's all right! Call it a loan, you know, and when you get your grip again you kin pay it back. The judge will be pretty sure to discharge you in the morning, if you tell your story all right and say that you have money to take care of yourself, as you have, you know; two dollars will go a good way in New York if you know how to use it. There's some place 'bout town somewheres, Friendless Girls' Home, or something of that sort, I think they call it,

where they take girls in who are looking for work and give 'em meals an' lodgings for five cents apiece. I'll find out where it is to-night and come down to the court in the morning and let you know."

"I never, sir, shall be able to repay you for this kindness!" the girl stammered, affected to tears by the goodness of this utter stranger.

"Oh, that is all O. K.; that is what we are put in this world for, to help each other along. It would be a lovely old world if each man went in to paddle his own canoe and let the other fellow sink. I'll be 'round in the morning; don't be afraid; keep a stiff upper lip; you'll come out all right."

The man performed his mission and then departed, his last words being one of cheer and encouragement. But fate had not yet vented all her spite upon the head of the forlorn girl.

To anticipate: the good-hearted policeman was not able to return in the morning, for on his way back to the Park he came upon a couple of footpads, who had waylaid a drunken gentleman, and were endeavoring to secure his valuables.

The officer sprang to the rescue, and the ruffians, being cornered, showed fight; they were armed, and did not hesitate to use their weapons.

A desperate encounter ensued; the officer was game to the backbone and clung to his prisoners until assistance arrived, but received such severe wounds as to necessitate his being carried to the hospital, and so he did not appear in the morning as he had promised.

Judge Himmelstein was on the bench; the reader has already made the acquaintance of this rather peculiar Dutchman, but it must be remembered that the events detailed in a preceding chapter which took place in the judge's court, occurred some two weeks later, for it was on the very evening of the robbery of Mrs. Plantagenet's safe that Helen Home slept in durance vile, locked up like a felon in a cell. We have retraced our steps in order to take up the fortunes of the girl.

The judge was not in a very good humor that morning. He had been taking a "flyer" in Wall street—acting upon some "reliable" information that a stock broker friend had kindly given him—and upon looking over his morning paper had been disgusted to discover that he was on the wrong side of the market and about a thousand dollars out of pocket.

Small mercy had he that day for any of the unfortunate wretches brought before his august tribunal!

Helen was sent up last of all and his Honor, the judge, with his mind on Wall street, cudgeling his brains as to how he should retrieve his losses, barely more than noticed that she was a girl and tolerably well-dressed.

"V'at ish der sharge?"

"Vagrancy, found wandering in Central Park, intoxicated," responded an officer.

"Oh, no, no, sir!" cried Helen, startled into speech at the horrid accusation.

"Silence in der court!" thundered the judge, glaring at her with wrath in his judicial eye.

The girl shrunk timidly back in one corner of the box; she had been looking for the friendly face of the honest Park policeman, and failing to discover him amid the motley crowd that lounged in the court-room, felt as though she was without a friend in the world.

The judge, satisfied with the impression which he had made, relaxed his frown and condescended to ask:

"Vell, got somethings to say?"

"I? No, sir," responded Helen, timidly. She had been so sternly rebuked before for venturing to declare her innocence she thought it better not to repeat the offense.

"Vell, ten tollars."

"Ten dollars! what does he mean, sir?" asked the girl of the policeman, bewildered.

"Why, you are fined ten dollars."

"And will I have to pay it?"

"You bet!"

"But I hav'n't ten dollars in the world."

"Can't ante, and passes," muttered the officer, while the girl looked at him, understanding as little what he meant as though he had spoken in Choctaw.

The judge had his eyes on them and had noticed the conversation.

"V'at ish it?" he asked.

"No money, judge; says she is broke."

"Oh, vell, ten days und de Island, den."

"What does he mean by that, sir?"

"Why, you are sent up to the Island for ten days—Blackwell's, you know, where the prison is. Ain't you fly?"

"A prison!" muttered the unfortunate girl, with white lips and a terrible terror tagging at her heart.

"But I haven't done anything, sir!" she pleaded.

"In course you have—drunk and disorderly; you're fortunate that he didn't send you up for six months," responded the officer, coarsely. "It's jucky for you that the judge is in a good humor this morning, or you would have got a long stretch."

The girl only stared blankly, for the words seemed like a hollow mockery to her.

To prison—she, so young, so innocent of all wrong-doing! It did not seem possible!

What evil star sat in her house of life?

Just at this moment a short, thickset and very fat man, with a fiery red face, iron-gray hair and beard, who had been standing at the rear of the court room, came to the front.

"Hold on, judge, a moment," he said, nodding familiarly to the justice, like an old acquaintance. "I think I know this young woman, and I will pay her fine."

"How you vash, senator? You settles der fine, eh?" said the judge, snaking hands with the old gentleman with great cordiality.

"Yes, I know her; nice girl; gets a little off once in a while. You see, a few glasses of beer goes right to her head and upsets her."

"Dat ish so; feefty or sixty glasses fixes me! How ish all der po-s?"

"Lively; well clean things next election."

"Look you out for me at der Albany, you know, eh?" whispered the judge.

"All right; if anything fat comes along, I will throw it in your way. Here's your ten."

"Dat ish all right," responded the judge, pushing the bill back, yet with a sort of a wofish glare at the roll of notes that the politician displayed. "I remit der fine."

"Thank you; I will do as much for you one of these days." The "senator" nodded to the judge, then beckoned to Helen to come out. When she did so, he placed her arm within his own and left the court room. She went blindly, unresistingly, not knowing what else to do.

"I tell you! It is lucky I recognized you!" he remarked, after they got into the street.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DETECTIVE'S MASTER.

In a pleasant front room of the Brevoort House, the New York hotel so much favored by our English cousins, sat a portly, well-preserved, middle-aged gentleman, whose general appearance indicated that he was a son of Albion.

He was dressed with scrupulous care, had a pleasant face, and yet there were some ugly lines upon it which indicated that he had had his share of care and toil and had not passed unscathed through the world.

In his hand he held a telegraph dispatch, and he had read it over again and again with a thoughtful air.

"LONG BRANCH, NEW JERSEY, {
Tuesday afternoon.

"To Mr. MATHEW GARROWCROFT, BREVOORT HOUSE, NEW YORK CITY:—

"I have run the game to earth; shall close in and capture to-night. Expect me up with the prize by to-morrow noon at the latest. (Signed)

"MUTTLEBUD."

"The deuced ass!" the gentleman muttered, after he had read the telegram for the fourth time. "Takes twenty odd words to say what he could have easily put in ten. 'Up to-morrow noon at the latest,' and that was three days ago, and not a sign of the rascal have I seen. Not only that, but I can't reach him, for when he didn't come I wired him in order to see what was the matter, and the telegraph people notified me that they can't find him. What can have happened to the idiot?"

At this moment there came a knock at the door, and in answer to the gentleman's summons a servant entered, bearing a card on a salver.

"Gentleman to see you, sir."

Mr. Garrowcroft took up the card and on it read the name of the very man whom he had had in his thought.

"Gayaway Muttlebud—show him up, if you please."

Five minutes later the burly stranger who had so affrighted the country girl with his arrogant threats entered the apartment.

"How d'ye do?" exclaimed Mr. Muttlebud, grinning with great cordiality; "you didn't expect to see me, I will bet a hat!"

"Well, sir, you would lose your hat," responded the other, with chilling tones, "for I did expect to see you—have been waiting for you for three whole days and wondering what on earth had become of you."

"Thought I was lost, I reckon," and then this loud-talking gentleman indulged in a vociferous "Hal ha!" as if he thought it was a good joke, and under cover of his mirth he helped himself to a chair.

"I do not see any cause for merriment, sir!" exclaimed the Englishman, sharply. "I received your dispatch three days ago; here it is; and I have been expecting you ever since, and now that you have come, where is the prize whose capture you so confidently predicted in this?" and the speaker tapped the telegram with his finger.

"Well, you see, my lord—"

"I am not a lord, sir!" interrupted the other, impatiently, "and I wish to Heaven you would stop calling me my lord!"

"Of course! Oh, I understand!" and Muttlebud put his tongue in his cheek, then winked, mysteriously. "It's all right; a wink is as good as a nod to a blind horse. I sha'n't forget again, but it jest slips out by accident, once in a while."

"Will you stop your nonsense and go ahead? You have failed, I presume?"

"Failed! No, sir!" cried Muttlebud, theatrically. "As the feller in the play says—'In the bright lexicon of Gayaway Muttlebud thar's no sich word as fail!'"

"The fellow in the play, as you elegantly put it, doesn't say a word about any Muttlebud; but get on."

"I will; I have succeeded at every pint 'cept one. Let me show you, 'cording to the instructions."

Then with a flourish he drew from his breast-pocket a large memorandum-book, upon one of the covers of which, in bright gold letters, was the inscription, "Gayaway Muttlebud, Private Detective," opened the book and read aloud:

"Monday—well the date don't signify. 'Engaged by Mr. Mathew Garrowcroft on a secret mission. A girl wanted, about eighteen years old, description, (guessed at, not cer air) rather tall, light brown hair, blue eyes, red and white complexion, looks like an English girl. Name, Helen, other name unknown, and not material. Supposed to be living with a farmer somewhere near Long Branch, New Jersey. Name of farmer uncertain, but something like Wayland or Wayband."

"That is all correct, isn't it?"

"It is."

"I found the gal—nam, Helen—blue eyes, but dark brown hair instead of light brown—red and white complexion all right; does look like an English girl. Brought up by a farmer named Timothy Waybit, always been called Helen Waybit and supposed by the neighbors to be the old man's daughter, but a short time ago the farmer let out that she wasn't his daughter; some little mystery about the child apparently. Old man's story is that he found her when a baby in New York in a basket, evidently deserted by her parents, and that is all he knows about her. The neighbors, however, are not satisfied with the explanation, and think the old cuss is not telling the truth. Mystery 'bout the old man; poor farmer, mean, miserable farm, yet he manages to get along and pay his debts; everybody thinks he has an income independent of the farm, and a good many people think he gets money on account of the child from somebody who is paying him for keeping it."

"How's that, governor? Didn't I strike the right gal first lick, eh?"

"Yes, yes, no doubt about it!" the Englishman exclaimed, evidently excited and nervous. "It is the girl for a thousand pounds."

"Exactly what I said; my mutton for a million!"

"But how was it that you were going to bring her and yet have not? I presume you haven't, or you would have said something about it."

"No, I haven't got her," the detective admitted, with rather a sheepish air.

"Well, that doesn't matter; I did not instruct you to bring the girl. Of course I have no authority in the premises at present; that will take time. It is all right as long as I know where she is, so that I can put my hands upon her at any moment."

"Waal, the fact is, governor, you can't do it, exactly," the man rejoined.

"Why so?"

Then Mr. Muttlebud had to explain. He had formed a nice little plan to get the girl to come to New York with him, and things seemed to be working all right when one night the girl suddenly disappeared. She had gone out in the evening and had never returned.

"At first," said the detective, in conclusion, "I had an idea that old Waybit had jest hid her out of my way, and I went for him red-hot, but arter awhile I came to the conclusion that he was honest about the matter and didn't know any more about the girl's disappearance than I did."

"And then I got on the track of some village gossip, 'bout how she had a feller, some stranger chap from the city, a kind of seedy feller, according to all accounts, whom she used to meet on the beach, and putting this and that together, 'bout everybody was of the opinion that she had sloped with the chap."

The Englishman covered his face with his hands and groaned aloud, much to the surprise of Muttlebud, who stared at him open-mouthed.

"Oh, this terrible pain!" murmured Mr. Garrowcroft, after a moment, taking his hands from his face, which had flushed very red, a sign of great excitement in men of his habit, who generally turn red when other men become pale; he pressed one hand to his side and heaved a deep sigh. "I am subject to these attacks, but they do not last long. So all trace of the girl is lost!"

"Governor, I tell yer, it ain't often that I am flabbergasted!" the detective exclaimed, impressively, "but I will have to own up beat this time."

"Where would the girl and her lover be apt to fly?" questioned the Englishman.

"Now, that requires some head-work."

"Not at all; where else would they go but to this city?"

"That was just what I was a-going to say."

"It is certain, if they feared pursuit."

"Oh, they did, or the feller did, anyway, for he had got into a row in the village and polished off his man like a prize-fighter. There was a

warrant out ag'in' him, and that was the reason he gave leg bail."

"And what hope is there of finding this one girl amid the million souls who people this great metropolis?" asked the Englishman, despondently.

"Why, governor, it can be done; you jest give me the job, and see if I don't fetch it as nicely as I did the country fair. Didn't I do that right up to the handle?"

"Yes, you did very well in all but the one important thing; you let the girl slip through your fingers."

"How could I help it? Wasn't I working under difficulties anyway? I didn't know what you wanted of the girl. Even if I knew that she was going I couldn't have stopped her by law, you know. You see, governor, you ain't acting according to Hoyle in this matter. You haven't told me what you want of the girl; I am completely in the dark."

"I went for the old cuss with the yarn that there was a big reward out, and all that sort of talk, but he was a tough old sinner and wouldn't have it for a cent. Now, jest let me know how the thing is, and I'm sure I kin fix it as easy as rolling off a log!"

But the Englishman didn't see it in that light; he merely said it made no difference, and then fell to discussing plans to ascertain the whereabouts of the lost Helen.

Energetic measures were at once taken; advertisements inserted in the papers, the police notified, and all the machinery possible put in motion.

And the advertisements appeared on the very morning that Helen Home left the court escorted by Senator Bumblebig.

CHAPTER XVII.

BEGINNING THE ATTACK.

As we stated in a former chapter, at the close of the examination in Judge Himmilstein's court, Denly Livingstone departed in freedom after giving bail, while the accuser, in default of any one willing to give a thousand dollars bond as security for his appearance, was carried off to the House of Detention—a precaution adopted by the court to insure the witness's presence when the trial day came.

Now, to the two sharpest men in the courtroom that day the same idea had occurred, and those two were the Superintendent of Police and Ned Purchase, the lawyer, neither of whom believed that young Livingstone had anything to do with the affair, but the fact of the coachman swearing out the warrant when he failed at the inquest to come forward, seemed to them a circumstance that required explanation, and when they met in the street after the case was over, briefly they discussed the matter.

"Odd case," said the lawyer.

"Very," replied the superintendent.

"Your men have been working at it, I suppose?"

"Yes, on the quiet, ever since it occurred."

"Any headway?"

"None at all."

"Very good trick, but it wasn't this young blood."

"Oh, no; although he appears to have profited more by it than anybody else. I think there is something back which has not come out yet, and which may show that somebody else had something to gain by robbing the safe."

"The murder was an accident, clearly; that was not on the programme."

"No; the fellow was trying to get away, and had no intention of seriously injuring the old lady."

"How about this coachman; isn't this accusation a cunning device to throw suspicion upon an innocent man, and so screen the real criminal?" asked Purchase, shrewdly.

"My own idea exactly."

"But, like some other smart men, he would be better off if he wasn't so smart."

"You are right there! I have had about everybody connected with the house shadowed, this fellow among the rest; it didn't amount to anything, but now I think I have got a clew."

"Which you wouldn't have had if this fellow had held his tongue."

"Nary time!"

"He is either the man who did the trick, or else he knows who did do it."

"My guess; and now that I find you are of the same opinion, Ned, it makes me think I am on the true trail."

Then, with friendly nods, the two parted.

The police chief was not slow in acting. When the coachman arrived at the House of Detention, another prisoner entered at the same time, an undersized man, who said he was a tailor, a stranger in the city, who had had his pocket picked, and was locked up as a witness against the man who had robbed him.

"We're pretty full here now," said the gruff official in charge, "so I guess we'll have to put you two chaps in one room."

The men growled a little at this, but there wasn't any help for it, so away they went.

When they were alone together the two fell into conversation.

"Just think! they wanted me to give two hundred dollars bail!" declared the tailor.

"I've got to give a thousand."

"Then there is nothing for us to do but to grin and bear it."

"Not much!" responded the other. "I'm not going to stay here."

"Can you raise a thousand dollars?"

"I've got a friend that will have to raise it; he don't da to refuse; but if he does, it won't be healthy for him."

The tailor's curiosity excited, he tried to get his companion to explain, but the coachman suddenly became dumb, as if he had already said too much; and he had, for the supposed tailor was in reality one of the keenest detectives in the city, and had been put with the prisoner for the express purpose of entrapping him.

But the coachman was a suspicious chap, and after this episode either held his tongue or else kept a careful watch on it.

Enough had been learned, though, to set the chief to keeping a good lookout for the man who "dared not" refuse to bail the coachman.

The next day the man appeared—a wealthy saloon-keeper; he went bail for the coachman, and then the detectives "went" for him; but the affair had been cunningly managed, for the saloon-keeper knew nothing of the coachman at all, but had been paid by a certain lawyer, whose reputation was none of the best, to go bail for the detained witness.

At the lawyer the search for the moment stopped, for the superintendent knew the slippery limb of the law would never reveal the name of a client, particularly if there was anything "crooked" in the case.

"But I'll have the man who is behind the lawyer if it takes a leg!" the police chief cried.

And from that time forth, night and day, a perpetual watch was kept upon the legal gentleman, and much to his annoyance, for he was too sharp not to discover that he was under surveillance, and as he had been mixed up in numerous transactions, more or less questionable, he was in considerable doubt in regard to the precise matter which had brought upon him such unwelcome attentions, but never for an instant ascribed it to the simple fact that he had arranged to bail a witness out of the House of Detention.

In this game of cross-purposes, with the detectives on the watch for evidence, and the lawyer alarmed and suspicious, it was a doubtful matter as to who would come out ahead in the long run.

Plot and counterplot in this quarter, and while the struggle was in progress, another began right in the Plantagenet mansion.

Richard Plantagenet, after coming to an understanding with Viola, had surveyed the field of action with careful eyes, and formed a plan of operations which he now proceeded to carry out.

He had been in the court-room during the examination, but keeping well in the background, so as not to be observed, and when it was over he was the first to leave.

Knowing the superintendent of police, Richard's first idea was that the chief was on hand ready to weave a web around the accused, but when the affair ended and the doctor introduced the prisoner to the officer, and the judge, superintendent, lawyer, doctor and Livingstone all indulged in a friendly chat, the young man comprehended that none of them believed there was anything in the accusation.

"It is a pretty hard fact to make the world believe that a man worth four or five millions could possibly put his neck in peril by committing so vulgar a crime as murder," he muttered, as he emerged from the halls of justice. "If I had been unlucky enough to have been arrested on this charge, I would not have got off so easily. He has tried his strength with the law and won the wrestle without a hard breath; now, he will have to measure wits with me, and we shall see if he comes off with such flying colors."

Richard Plantagenet, for all his quiet ways, was a daring, desperate fellow when roused to action.

He had studied over his plan of attack and could not discover a weak point in it.

"The sooner I get to work the better," was his muttered observation as he entered the Plantagenet mansion.

So, like a spider waiting for an ill-fated fly to walk into his web, Richard sat down by the window and waited for Danby's return.

He came at last, accompanied by the doctor, who shook hands with him warmly as they parted on the steps of the mansion.

Denby entered the house; Richard met him in the hall and asked if he could be favored with a few minutes' conversation.

"Certainly; let us step into the library," Denby replied.

Now, although the young man had a suspicion that Richard was not friend of his and had acted secretly and in an underhand manner ever since he had entered the Plantagenet household, yet he always treated him politely, and, since the death of his mother, had endeavored to forget

the sentiments which he had entertained. Denby was of a noble, generous nature and scorned to harbor resentment without great cause.

He had no actual proof that the other had endeavored to prejudice his mother against him, and although he strongly suspected that it was Richard who had put the detectives on his track while he was wandering in disguise, yet he was not sure.

Knowing his mother's disposition, he understood that she was quite capable of doing this herself without hint or suggestion from any one. And if Richard had but obeyed her orders in that business, he was hardly to blame, dependent as he was on her bounty.

After they entered the library, Richard took particular care to close the door carefully behind him.

"As I wish to talk to you upon some important business, I consider it necessary to be sure that what we say shall not be overheard by curious ears," he explained.

Denby looked a little surprised at this extreme precaution, and observed:

"I do not think there is much danger of any one playing the eavesdropper within the walls of this house; if I detected them so doing they would not remain here long."

"No doubt, but when a man comes to talk on business that involves a fortune of four or five millions of dollars, he is not prudent if he is not cautious."

Denby stared at this strange beginning.

CHAPTER XVII.

A STRANGE PROPOSAL.

LIVINGSTONE, considerably mystified, helped himself to a chair, and motioned Richard to be seated.

"It is a rather awkward matter to talk about, but, business is business."

And, with a slight pause, he continued:

"A month ago you were in disgrace—in exile, so to speak, and now, within the short space of thirty days, you are your own master and the possessor of a colossal fortune—a wonderful change, you'll grant."

"It is not so wonderful that I should inherit my mother's fortune; it is but following out the natural order of events."

"Ah, yes; but just look how improbable it seemed only a short time ago, that such a thing should have happened! Now, I am not a betting man, but, if I was, a year ago to-day I would have been willing to wager ten years of my life against a glass of wine—no small odds—that you stood a better chance of being made emperor over the United States than of getting hold of the fortune of which you are now in possession."

There was something in the manner of the speaker, in the tone of his voice which warned young Livingstone that something unpleasant was in reserve.

"One year ago," he went on, "Gloster Plantagenet was alive, and you and he were not on good terms; he fancied, too, that he had good grounds for disliking you. You did not pay him the respect which was due from a son to a father."

"He was no father of mine!" exclaimed Denby, his face flushing. "My father was a gentleman in every respect, and so thoroughly honest that he died a poor man, when by simply shutting his eyes at certain times, he, too, might have gained thousands, and in time swelled the sum total to millions."

Richard's lip curled a trifle; he had no sympathy with the man who neglected to take money when it was within his reach simply because there might be a doubt in regard to the morality of the transaction.

Denby did not notice the look, but kept on, for this was one of the subjects upon which he was sensitive.

"The man is dead and gone, and I will endeavor not to wrong him in the least. There was a dislike existing between us from the beginning. Had though I was, I thought my mother was crazy when she married him. I did not then understand, as I came to in after years, how she was fascinated by the wealth of this adventurer—for he was nothing more, and if he had failed instead of succeeding, all the world would have said so; but a golden mantle covers a multitude of sins, and Gloster Plantagenet's money blinded the world to Gloster Plantagenet's faults. What was the meaning of the mystery that shrouded all his early life? Do you know aught of him in England?"

Richard shook his head.

"No; nor anybody else," Denby resumed; "His life before he came to this country was all a blank; no one ever heard him speak of it, and when questioned—some inquisitive people will question even millionaires—he always evaded giving a direct answer."

"Don't talk of England," he would say, 'I have lived so long in this country and prospered so greatly that I want to forget I ever lived anywhere else. I am an American, heart and soul, and I do not wish to remember that I was ever unfortunate enough to have been born in another country.'

"Most men, particularly those who rise up from nothing, after they acquire wealth are

anxious to return to the place of their birth, or, at any rate, where they spent their early years in poverty and toil, so as to be able, with the pride that comes from success, to dazzle the eyes of the people who knew them when they had nothing, with the show of their wealth. Gloster Plantagenet never returned to England even for a visit, and I always had a thought that he dared not go."

"I may wrong him in this; it is but a thought, and I will frankly own that there is no foundation for it, beyond the imaginations of my brain. My mother was charmed by his oily ways; and then, too, his wealth replaced her in the position from which she was gradually falling for lack of means. He wanted her to grace his triumph, as the old Roman victors used to drag the captive barbarian kings at their chariot wheels to make a Roman holiday. Money he had won; he was a great man among the Wall street kings, but his position in society was not so well assured; there was a certain circle in which he desired to shine, but to which even his millions could not gain him free access."

"When he married my mother he accomplished his purpose, for the daughter of a Von Tromp and the wife and widow of a Livingstone had *entrée* everywhere. His gold bought my mother, harsh as it may seem to say it, but it is the truth, for if he had been poor the union would never have taken place. But it did not buy me, and from the beginning he knew that I both disliked and distrusted him, and, despite all his efforts, he never was able to change my opinion in the least."

"And that is why I say the chances were great against your inheriting his money!" Richard remarked, a very perceptible sneer on his face.

"Not his money, Mr. Richard Plantagenet, but my mother's money, the bribe for which she sold herself to this man who came across the seas with a dead past to which he was afraid to refer," Denby retorted.

"A lucky chance for you that there was a child born of that union, so that the wife could inherit all, failing the child; lucky chance, too, the death of that little girl in infancy, so that in the absence of a will all the property came to you."

"Heaven works in wondrous ways; it gives and it takes away; it is our kismet—our fate—that we are as we are."

"It was a sad blow to both Viola and myself, for we had always been led to expect that on the death of our uncle we would be handsomely remembered."

"His death came so sudden that he had no time to arrange his earthly matters."

"That was lucky for you again, for he most certainly would have done his best to have fixed the money so that you would never have got any of it."

"He would have found it a difficult matter to have arranged it without wronging his wife, and our courts are severe on unjust wills."

"And then your mother's sudden death, too—how strange! She had no time to arrange her affairs," Richard remarked, fixing his eyes searchingly upon Denby's face, who did not shrink from the scrutiny, although irritated by it. "There was another wonderful piece of luck for you, for there isn't any doubt in my mind that if she had been able to attend to affairs matters would be different from what they are now."

"It is possible, for my mother was irritated, and most unjustly, against me."

"That, of course, is a mere matter of opinion; she believed that she was acting for the best. And now, Denby, to come right down to business, on behalf of Viola and myself—but without her sanction or any consultation with her, you understand—I thought I would see what your views are in regard to her and myself. We were brought from England by our uncle; we were told that at his death we should be provided for, and when his sudden taking off prevented the fulfillment of that promise, your mother was kind enough to us and true enough to the memory of her dead husband to repeat the pledge; but a second time the sickle of the grim destroyer sets at naught human calculations, and we now have no one to look to but you."

"I have thought over the matter, Richard, and I know that my mother would have kept her word had not death come upon her so quickly; and although I do not think, since your sojourn beneath this roof, you have ever been a true friend to me, yet I am willing to let the past rest; you are free to make this house your home as long as you choose so to do, both yourself and Viola, and I will give to each of you, in cash, one hundred thousand dollars—a free gift without any conditions and with which you can do as you like."

"Two hundred thousand dollars out of four or five million is a mere drop in the bucket!" the other retorted, scornfully. "Suppose your mother had executed the will which she drew out before her death, in which she gave half her property to charity and all the rest to Viola and myself, with the exception of a fifty-thousand-dollar bequest to be held in trust for you and your children?"

"But no such will was executed."

"Don't you be too sure of that; don't make me try to hunt it up. Come, Denby, give Viola and myself a million between us; you'll never miss it, and it will be better than a contest."

"That sounds like a threat, and I refuse!" exclaimed the other, rising in heat.

"I won't do anything rashly, but when I get the will you shall see it; then we may come to terms."

And Richard bowed himself out.

CHAPTER XIX.

A LIBERAL OFFER.

"YES, yes," continued the elderly gentleman who had so kindly interested himself in Helen's behalf as they walked down the street together, "it was really fortunate that I should have happened to stroll into the court-room just as I did; and fortunate, too, that I recollected your face; but I have really a remarkable memory, and after I have once seen a face I seldom forget it, although the name may escape me."

The gentleman spoke so confidently the girl did not know what to make of it. She stole a sly glance at him as she asked herself whether it was possible she had met him and had forgotten the circumstance; but upon reflection she was positive it could not be.

His peculiar figure could not be easily forgotten; she was certain she had never seen him before, and it was plain he was laboring under some misapprehension.

"Now, though I knew you the instant I saw you—and so much astonished I was to see you in such a hole—I couldn't recall your name to save me."

"Helen Home," the girl confessed, thinking its utterance would show the stranger his mistake.

But it didn't; he only nodded his head in a satisfied way.

"Ah, yes; I was sure it was a short and Homely name, and that was the reason perhaps why I forgot it."

And the "senator" laughed at his feeble attempt at a joke.

"I knew you, though, for all that. Why, I was just thinking about you the other day and wondering where you was; do you know I never had anybody since you left who attended to my correspondence as well as you?"

It was now plain enough the man was laboring under a mistake, and Helen must undeceive him.

"Pardon me, sir, but you have made a mistake and confounded me with some one else," she said.

"The deuce I have! Why, it isn't possible!"

"Oh, but it is, sir, because I am sure we have never met before—I never was an amanuensis for anybody."

"Quite impossible that I could have made a mistake!" he persisted. "Never forget a face, you know, never! I may be a little weak on names, but on faces, oh, no!"

"But it is the truth, sir; I have only been in the city three or four times in my life, having always lived in the country."

"Pon my life! if I have made a mistake it would be the most remarkable thing! most wonderful resemblance, you know. But, are you positive about it? Isn't your memory a little treacherous? Just try and think now; didn't you act as a sort of secretary to me, Senator Bumblebig—J. J. Bumblebig—Jefferson Jackson Bumblebig—at my house just above Tarrytown, on the Hudson, about two years ago?"

"No, sir; ever since I was a little girl I have lived on a farm in New Jersey, and have never been away from it except to come to New York three or four times, and then I always returned home the same day."

"I am really astonished!" the senator exclaimed, in a tone of profound amazement. "I would not have been willing to believe there could be two people in this world so much alike. You are the very image of the young lady who acted as my secretary for a couple of months about two years ago."

"She was taken ill and had to go away; she promised to return as soon as she was able, but I never heard a word from her. I can't explain to you how much I missed her, and I have been on the lookout ever since; she was worth double any secretary I ever had, and when I saw you this morning I was sure you were she, but now I come to think of it, it strikes me that her name was Ellen instead of Helen. Well, well, I'm sorry."

"It was not my fault, sir," said the girl, timidly.

"Certainly not, and, on the whole, I am very glad the mistake occurred, for it has been the means of getting you out of a nasty position; so it is all right, anyway. Deuced funny, though, when you come to think of it, and you must have had an idea I was a little cracked in the upper story when I claimed acquaintance with you so boldly."

"I did not understand it, and I presume I did not act rightly in not trying to undeceive you, but I was in such a position I knew not what to say."

"That is all right, my dear young lady, and I

am glad the mistake occurred, as it was of service to you; and I must say that, since you look so like the lady I knew, I wish you were able to come and be my secretary in her place. I don't know, of course, how you are situated, but the salary is liberal—twenty dollars a month; you will be an inmate of my household, up on the Hudson, and you will find the duty of the position light, and, I think, very agreeable."

Had the ground opened before the young girl she could not have been more astonished than she was at this unexpected offer.

Here she was, alone and friendless—a stranger in a great city, not knowing which way to turn, with only enough money in her pocket to keep her for a couple of days, and now, like a good spirit from another world, this stranger came!

All she feared was that she would not be equal to the duties of the situation, although she had received an excellent education and wrote a beautiful hand.

And this she diffidently expressed, but the senator, who seemed to be a jolly fellow, laughed at the idea.

"Oh, I do not think there will be any difficulty on that score," and then he put a few questions to her in regard to her handwriting and kindred matters, all of which she answered to his apparent satisfaction.

"You'll suit, I guess," he decided. "Now, all you have to do is to let your folks know of your engagement, and then I will take you right out with me."

"I haven't any folks in the city, nor acquaintances either; I have just come from the country and am like one lost in this wilderness of houses." And she briefly related the strange experience through which she had passed since landing in New York.

The gentleman listened with great attention, and when she had finished expressed his wonder at her strange adventures.

"I have heard of that Canary family before," he remarked. "The old man is a colossal rogue and so cunning that he generally manages to slip through the meshes of the law, but your trials are over now; so, if you please, we will go to the depot and take the train."

With a light heart our Poor Girl went.

The clouds which had enshrouded her ever since her arrival in the city seemed to be clearing away and the bright sun of fortune shone clearly forth.

Ah, if she could only have looked into the near future!

At the depot the senator insisted upon the girl partaking of some refreshments, remarking that no doubt she needed them.

Helen would have declined, for her heart was so full of joy at the brilliant prospect which had so unexpectedly opened before her, that she had not the least longing for food, but the "senator" insisted and she yielded.

Before they started he telegraphed for his coachman to meet the train, and so, when they arrived at their destination, the carriage was in waiting.

"I think you will like Oak Hall," he said, after they were in the carriage and on their way. "It is a fine place, so considered by every one; it has cost a fortune; but I didn't foot the bill, though; the man that did was ruined by it and I bought the property for a quarter of its real value. By the way, I never thought about your baggage."

Helen looked confused, for she had begun to comprehend now how strange it looked for a young girl to be traveling without any baggage whatever, and she was just about to explain that she had come away in such a hurry that she left every one of her possessions behind, when he saved her the trouble by saying:

"But, that doesn't matter; as long as it is safe where it is, it isn't hardly worth while sending for it. I will advance you a quarter's salary; you can make out a list of what you want and my housekeeper will get them for you."

Helen was so confused by this kind offer that all she could do was to stammer forth her thanks while tears rose in her brilliant eyes.

"My dear, don't say a word; it doesn't make any difference to me," he said, in reply. "You might just as well have the money in advance as any other way; but here we are!"

As the senator had said, Oak Hall was indeed a magnificent place. The house was a massive mansion, built out of stone and wood combined, after the fashion common to England in the time of the Cavaliers. The estate comprised the whole of a point jutting out into the river, about ten acres in extent, and all access to the mainland was cut off by a massive stone wall, pierced in the center with ponderous iron gates. A stone porter's lodge stood by the gates and the porter, a stout, rather ill looking German, received the "master" with servile humility.

"This is my housekeeper, Mrs. Sparrow," the senator said, as they entered the house and a large, middle aged woman with a stern, hard face advanced to receive them. "Miss Helen Home, Mrs. Sparrow; she is about to undertake the duties of the secretarystip."

The woman inclined her head in salutation

and in a very cold, calm way remarked that she would do her best to make the young lady comfortable.

"Let me see! I guess you had better put Miss Home in the last room in the north wing; and Miss Home requires some few articles to be purchased. Get the list and come to me for the money."

The girl was conducted to her apartment by Mrs. Sparrow, who as Helen thought, looked at her in a strange way every now and then.

CHAPTER XX.

A NEW LIFE.

THE apartment to which Helen was conducted was on the top floor of the house, at the extreme end of the extension known as the north wing, and from the windows a really beautiful view of the river and the opposite shore could be obtained.

It was furnished in the most luxurious manner, and Helen, who had never been used to any luxury in her life, could not resist an exclamation of surprise upon being ushered into the room, which more resembled the chamber of a princess than the sleeping apartment of a servant.

"A fine room, isn't it, miss?"

"Oh, yes; beautiful!"

And it was, indeed; for not only were the carpet and furniture of the most costly and elaborate description, but the walls were adorned with elegant paintings and hung with silken draperies after the old-fashioned tapestry style.

"Is there not some mistake?" Helen queried. "It is not possible that this can be the apartment designed for me?"

"No mistake, miss; this is the room; the senator never makes a mistake, and you mustn't even hint that he does, or else you will make him frightfully angry," responded the woman, in her cold, hard, dry tones.

"I would much prefer a plainer room. I have never been used to such luxurious surroundings, and I fear that it will take me a long time to get used to them."

"Humph!" grunted the woman; "you will be a great deal different from the rest if you do not only get used to the room, but complain because it isn't finer."

"The rest—I do not understand."

"The rest of your sex, of course; I don't count myself a woman now, because I am old and have got through with all kinds of nonsense. You will get used to it; time enough. It's your room, anyway, and you must make out to be contented with it. Now, if you will make me out the list of the things you want, I will see that they are got; and don't stint yourself; money is no more to the senator than so much water when he takes a notion into his head."

This seemed all very strange to the country girl; she could not understand it; but there was something so harsh and repellent about the housekeeper that she did not like to ask her to explain.

She wrote out the list, and when Mrs. Sparrow glanced over it her lip curled in contempt.

"Well, you are modest in your requirements!" and then she checked the articles off rapidly on her fingers. "Why, the things put down here won't cost fifteen dollars!"

"But it is all I can afford, at present!"

"Nonsense! You can have a hundred dollars' worth if you like, and you haven't got any dresses down. You don't suppose you can wear that one dress all the time, do you?"

Helen looked down at her garb in dismay. It was a pretty dress, fashionably made, Helen's own handiwork, and fitted her superb figure like a glove, though composed of cheap materials.

"I presume I ought to have another dress for house wear, but I have always been so poor that I have never been able to afford more than one good dress at a time," the girl replied, with perfect simplicity.

A puzzled expression crept over Mrs. Sparrow's face, and for a moment she stared hard at Helen, much to her astonishment.

"Well, miss, I must say, you are a strange kind of a girl, as girls go nowadays. Don't you know that it is a crime and a disgrace to be poor, and that no one ever ought to own up to it? Why don't you tell me that you have got silks and satins and all sorts of pretty things at home, and that you forgot to bring your trunks with you, or some other stupid lie?"

"But it isn't the truth, madam," the girl responded, in her sweet way; "and please don't speak of home, for there is no such thing in the wide world for me. I am alone, utterly alone, and I do not possess a single article beyond what I have upon my person," and as she made the confession Helen could not prevent the hot tears from welling up into her eyes.

Despite the scoured disposition of the housekeeper she could not help being touched by this speech, so plaintive y delivered.

"Well, miss, all I have to say is that you are the strangest young woman I have ever seen. I thought truth and honesty, and all that sort of thing, had died out long ago, but when I listen to you it kinder makes me think there may be

some goodness left in the world yet. And now, as for the things you need, you must have a couple of dresses, one for morning wear and one for dinner and evening. You will dine with the senator—"

"Oh, no!"

"Oh, yes; that is his rule; you are more than a servant, you know; you answer to a confidential man of business, and you will dine regularly with the senator, so you must have the dresses."

"I suppose I must if you say so; you know best, but I cannot afford much for I am only to receive twenty dollars a month."

"Oh, don't let that trouble you; the senator is good for a hundred or maybe two if you feel inclined to be extravagant."

"But I do not want to be extravagant. I want to be as prudent as possible!" the girl declared. "Why, just think, Mrs. Sparrow, how long it will take me to save up a hundred dollars, to say nothing of two hundred!"

Again the woman indulged in her peculiar grunt, the meaning of which Helen could not comprehend.

"Well, I will do the best I can. Perhaps you are right in being prudent, for there's no telling what will happen. I will get two dresses for you and I will take care to see that while they are nice they shall not be expensive ones."

Mrs. Sparrow departed, sought the senator, and told him that fifty dollars would purchase all the lady required.

"She is moderate in her ideas, isn't she?" he remarked, as he handed over the money. "Something wonderful in a woman. I shouldn't be surprised if this one turned out to have more sense than all the rest of them put together."

And so desirous was the proprietor of Oak Hall that his secretary should have her things promptly and properly selected that he desired the housekeeper to go down to New York in person and procure the articles.

So expeditious was Mrs. Sparrow that she was back by five o'clock, bringing with her quite a neat little wardrobe.

And when Helen was dressed for dinner, in the really pretty dark evening dress which the housekeeper had selected with excellent taste, she looked like another creature from the bag-gard, frightened girl who trembled within the prisoner's box in the police court.

"Here's some jewelry the senator said you might wear," the housekeeper observed, after she had finished robing the girl, for she had insisted upon aiding her to dress, despite Helen's remonstrances.

Then Mrs. Sparrow produced a pair of bracelets, a necklace and a pair of earrings, and the lone country girl could not repress the natural womanly exclamation of delight that rose to her lips as she looked upon the sparkling gems:

"Oh, are they not beautiful? I never saw anything so beautiful before in my life! Why, they sparkle as if they were diamonds!"

"Yes, they are very good imitations of diamonds," the housekeeper observed, a peculiar expression upon her face. "Not many people would be able to tell them from diamonds."

"But they are far too beautiful for me to think of wearing."

"Oh, no; just let me try them on and see how they will set you off. Beauty unadorned is all well enough to talk about, but it is such ornaments as these as will make women beautiful!"

And with dexterous fingers she adjusted the gems.

The effect was surprising.

"I hardly know myself!" Helen exclaimed, with a beaming face. "But, somehow, it does not seem right that I should wear these costly things, for I know they must be worth a great deal of money, even if they are not the real gems."

"You had better wear them; it is a whim of the senator; you see he would not be satisfied if you did not make a good appearance at his table. You will have to preside over it, regularly, you know, and then, when he gives his dinner-parties, he has a great many prominent men in public life as guests, and of course it wouldn't do not to have you all fixed up."

Helen looked amazed at this; surely never was a humble secretary so treated before.

But, since the senator was so kind and generous, Helen felt that she ought to comply with his wishes as much as possible, and so wore the jewels.

At the table Bumblebig complimented her greatly upon her improved appearance, and, in his lively, chatty way, soon put the young girl completely at her ease, and although she had no experience in the rôle, yet being a natural-born lady, she presided over the table as though she had been used to it all her life.

Two weeks passed swiftly away, two happy weeks, for Helen's position was a pleasant one, and the work was very light, but, as the senator explained, the political campaign had not begun yet, and until that commenced the real work did not begin.

All that Helen regretted was that she was not able to go to the obelisk so as to be able to meet her lover as per agreement.

A half dozen times she had spoken to the senator about going to the city, but each time he

had something for her to do, so she could not go. She was annoyed, but did not know how to help it.

One evening, while she was meditating and wondering how she would be able to get to the city, the housekeeper abruptly entered her apartment.

"Miss Home, I cannot carry this load upon my conscience any longer!" she cried. "You are walking blindly to destruction, and I cannot bear to see it!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE HOUSEKEEPER'S STORY.

HELEN was sitting by the window, and as she had been planning and planning how to be able to meet the noble, manly lover whose image was ever before her, her gaze had been fixed upon the moonlit service of the majestic river, and it was with a start that she turned and faced the housekeeper, who, in her excitement, had entered the room without knocking.

"What did you say, Mrs. Sparrow?" she asked, hardly able to believe that she had heard aright.

"It is a shame, so it is, and, cold and cruel as I am, I cannot stand tamely by and see you fall into this old monster's power without making an effort to save you."

"But I do not understand—what is the matter?"

"Hush! Let me be sure first that I have not been followed, and that there is no spy lurking without, anxious to hear what I have to say. In such a case as this he is very suspicious, and I am not certain that he trusts me thoroughly."

She glided to the door, opened it, slowly and quietly, then peered out into the hall. No one was near, so she closed the door again, returned, took a chair and drew it up close to where Helen was seated.

"My dear child, haven't you any idea of the danger that threatens you?" she asked, her voice soft and gentle, and a tender look upon her face, usually so stern.

"Danger?" repeated Helen, unconsciously using the same cautious tone that the other had adopted.

"Yes, a most terrible danger and so near that I shudder when I think of it, and blame myself that I have not had the courage to warn you before. No doubt you have thought me a cold, hard, stern woman—a woman without pity—little charity for any of her sex; and so, too, I believed I was, but somehow you, with your little, simple ways, so devoid of all guile, have touched a chord in my heart and caused me to feel as I have not felt for years. You are so young, so innocent and unsuspecting! I have watched you closely ever since you came into this house, and it has been in my mind to warn you half-a-dozen times, but the demon of indifference was in my heart, and I said to myself—what though she is young, beautiful and innocent? Others as young, as beautiful and as innocent have been dragged into the dreadful gulf; why should I risk my worldly prosperity for the sake of saving her? But this afternoon I was tired and laid myself down for a little sleep, and in that restless slumber I dreamed. I thought my sister appeared to me, my dear dead sister who fled from this world of sin and sorrow over twenty years ago, dying when she was no older than you, dying right on the verge of womanhood, in the flush of her bright young beauty. I dreamed that she came to me and kissed my cheek in her old, cunning way and said, 'Martha, have you forgotten your sister who was torn so rudely away from you and hurled into an untimely grave? Think what you would have thought of a woman who could have stood coldly by and watched me descend to my awful doom without stretching forth a hand to save me! and in my sleep, to the vision, I murmured: 'I could have found it in my heart to have killed her.' 'Yes,' she answered, 'but what are you doing now? Will you see this poor child, Helen Home, sacrificed, and make no effort to save her? And then with a start I awoke. Miss Home, I am not a religious woman; I don't really know as I believe in anything at all; but if a message straight from Heaven did not come to me this afternoon, then no spirit word was ever given and received in this world."

Helen was speechless with astonishment.

"The story of my sister is soon told; it happened twenty years ago; but that vision to-day has brought the tragedy up as fresh in my memory as though it was only yesterday." Mrs. Sparrow spoke rapidly, evidently laboring under great excitement. "My sister and I were orphans, and we came to this country to seek our fortunes when but little more than children. I was seventeen, and she a year younger. We went out to service, I as a seamstress, and she as a nurse-girl, in the same family; a wealthy family, the head of which was a great man then and is so to-day. There was a son, a handsome fellow of twenty-five. After a time I saw that there was a familiarity existing between my sister and this young gentleman that their different positions did not warrant, and I warned my sister, Rose, against him, and she, poor foolish

child, cried and confessed that they were engaged to be married! I doubted his honesty, but she had perfect faith and fled with him one day. He was supposed to have gone on a pleasure trip to the West, and no one connected the disappearance of my sister with his absence but myself. In six months he returned, alone. I, desperate, in secret asked him for an explanation, when to my amazement he denied knowing anything about my poor child. Abashed and humbled I crept from his presence, for how could I tell that not a word of his denial was true? A week after that I received a letter from Rose. She was in Chicago, whither she had gone with this villain, and she was sick and dying. He had married her there, and then, when tired of her, had coldly told her the marriage was a false one, and inhumanly deserted her. Mad with rage I flew with the letter to his father, and he—laughed in my face, and asked what better I, or my foolish sister, could expect? Did I think that the son of a United States Senator would marry a servant girl merely because she had a pretty face? and then, unceremoniously, I was turned out of the house. I went to Chicago and arrived there just in time to have my sister die in my arms. I had a little money which I had saved up, and I tried to find out about the marriage, and as near as I could discover it was a lawful marriage, though celebrated under false names. This was done, he pretended, to evade pursuit; the lawyer, whom I employed, said it would have been a very difficult matter for my sister to have proved that she was really married to this villain if he had chosen to deny it and had money to block the wheels of justice. That is my sister's story, briefly told, and now I am determined that you shall not be lured to that self-same ruin."

"But no such danger threatens me!" Helen exclaimed, and as she spoke, thoughts of her mysterious lover were in her mind, but she could not bring herself to believe that he was anything but good and true.

"Why, you foolish child!" Mrs. Sparrow exclaimed, "is it possible that you have been here two weeks and yet have no suspicions at all?"

"No! What should I suspect?"

"Do you not see that this old monster is treating you as he would never treat any young woman whom he had engaged merely as a secretary?"

"He has been very kind, but I did not believe there was any evil in it!" replied Helen, now thoroughly alarmed.

"If you were not such an innocent you would have suspected him long ago. Does he not pay you all sorts of compliments and tell you how glad he is that he happened by accident to make your acquaintance, and then those magnificent diamonds that he insists upon your wearing—"

"And are they really diamonds, then?"

"Of course they are, and I supposed you knew it. I thought that you were only pretending when you spoke of them so lightly. I thought you were an adventuress who was perfectly satisfied to become this old monster's slave, to appear as his wife when he has one already living and from whom he cannot get free, although he has tried and tried, time and again."

"I, the senator's wife!" and her speaking countenance fully revealed how disgusted she was at the bare idea.

"Of course; that is what he brought you here for, although, as I have told you, he cannot legally marry, but he can arrange that, for, if you pretended to be scrupulous on that point, he would easily find some willing tool to play the part of a minister or a justice of the peace, and the farce of performing the marriage service would be gone through. Then, as long as his liking lasted, you could reign as mistress here, and when the fancy passed away you would be unceremoniously shown to the door and told to go about your business."

"This is horrible!" exclaimed Helen, in deep agitation.

Again the wheel of fortune had turned, and from peace and happiness, at one plunge, she was hurled to misery and despair!

"At first I believed that you was a willing victim, and not until I saw the precautions which were being taken, did I get the idea that you were an innocent about to be sacrificed. This room is the most lonely one in all the house; there isn't an occupied apartment near it. The windows are all fastened down so that they cannot be opened. You might scream at the top of your lungs here and no one would hear you. You have in reality been a prisoner in this house ever since you entered it. Do you remember the door in the passage as you turn from the main house into this wing?"

Helen nodded.

"That door has been locked every night since you have been here after you have retired to rest, so that if you had suspected the trap you were in and had attempted to escape after all had gone to sleep at night, you could not have got out of this wing. That circumstance first excited my suspicion, and then, one night, after you retired from the table, the old man drank

more deeply than usual and, for a wonder, got his brains muddled with liquor; it is hardly twice a year that he gets so. "When the wine is in the wit is out," and the senator is no exception to the rule, so he told me bluntly that he had made up his mind to marry you—and then he laughed, the vile beast! for he knows very well that I know he cannot legally marry any one; and he further said he thought to-morrow would be as good a time for the ceremony as any day, and that I must have an extra dinner prepared so as to do honor to the wedding; so, to-morrow, my child, he will force you to accept his suit."

"Never! I will die first!"

Just then the clang of a closing door came faintly to their ears.

"That was in the entry—some one is coming!" cried Mrs. Sparrow, starting to her feet.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SENATOR EXPLAINS.

"It must be the senator; no one else would dare to come!" the housekeeper continued, and then she glided to the door, carefully unlatched it and peered out. "It is the senator, and he is locking the door that leads into the entry; that is a bad sign; he is deeply steeped in liquor, too—I can tell that by the way he is fumbling with the lock. He means mischief, but do not be alarmed; he shall not harm you. I would strangle him with my own hands first!" and the air of fierce determination with which she spoke showed her purpose and her courage.

She closed the door and then looked around for a place of concealment. The large ward-robe, a massive piece of furniture placed against one of the walls of the apartment, caught her eye.

"This will do," she said, opening the door and stepping inside. "He will never dream that there has been any one in the room and will not think of searching for a listener. Keep up a bold heart, and pay no attention to his threats; defy him to do his worst, and before morning comes you shall be free from this place."

Mrs. Sparrow closed the door of the wardrobe, and as she did so a knock sounded through the apartment.

Helen was dreadfully agitated and excited, but exerted all her efforts to appear calm, as she bade the applicant enter.

The door opened and the senator appeared, but in an altogether different guise from what the girl had ever seen.

His face was unnaturally red, his steps unsteady, and his eyes had the expression which an overdose of liquor generally gives.

He came rolling into the room and closing the door, planted his back against it and surveyed the occupant with what was intended to be a genial smile, but the effects of the liquor turned it into a horrible grin.

"How's do?" he ejaculated, with a thickened utterance; "got kinder lonely down stairs, so I thought I would come up and see you for a while, so as to pass an agree'ble evening. Sit down—sit down, my dear, and make yourself comfortable."

The girl sunk into a chair at the command; like the most of her sex she had a horrible aversion to a drunken man.

With a laughable endeavor to walk straight and appear all right the senator made his way to a chair in the center of the apartment and succeeded in sitting down upon it, announcing the fact with a grunt of satisfaction; but, though so much under the influence of liquor, his cunning was not impaired.

"Mus' be lonesome up here, all here," he remarked; "guess I will have to come up and sit with you once in a while, keep you company, you know; fact is, Helen, my dear, I've taken a monstrous fancy to you; never saw a girl before in the whole course of m' life that I thought so much of on short 'quintance. Helen, m' darling, I am goin' to make a confession—an honest confession, you know. I've taken a leetle too much wine an' m' heart has got the better of m' judgment. I've been thinking 'bout sayin' somethin' to you long time; ever sence 'most the first time I met you. Helen, you're monstrous fine girl! I think a deal of you, Helen; in fact, I think th t it would trouble me to tell you how much I think of you. Now, I'm all 'lone in the world, my own master, you know—no folks to interfere, and poke their noses into my business, and I've made up my mind I love you more'n any woman I ever saw. Helen, m' darling, how would you like to be Mrs. Senator Bumblebig? How does that strike you, hey? That would be a little better than going to the Island for ten days!" and the old rascal chuckled heartily.

Now the girl, unsophisticated in the ways of the world, gave utterance to the first thing that came into her mind.

"How can you marry me, sir, when you already have a living wife?"

The senator's under jaw dropped and he gazed at the girl for a few moments in speechless astonishment, for the question was a stunner.

"Ba, what's the?" he stammered, at last.

"I asked you how you could marry me when your wife is still living?"

"An' who told you that?" he fairly howled. "I bet a ten dollar note I know! It's that mis-er'ble old hag, Mrs. Sparrow! I've had m' doubts 'bout that woman ever since you came into this house. She said then that you didn't seem to be like the rest, but was like a reg'lar lady, an' as innocent as a lamb. An innocent lamb in a police court, bein' sent to the Island—ten days—drunk and di-orderly!" and he laughed derisively, while the face of the poor girl grew red with shame as she thought of the awful trial through which she had passed.

"Guess she would have opened those old cat's eyes of hers if I had told her that, hey?" he continued. "But, I didn't say a word, 'cos I made up my mind the first time I saw you that you were just the kind of girl I wanted, and when I saw that you wanted to play innocent, you know, I tumbled to the little game right away, 'cos I always believe in letting everybody tell their own story; but you didn't fool me, you know—seen too many girls in m' time to be fooled. Now, never you mind what that old cat says; she's only jealous, 'cos she thinks that if you come in here as my wife maybe you'll turn her out; but I'll hist her, though, for this; ought to be ashamed of herself, interfering in her master's affairs."

Helen felt that she ought to try and lift the blame from the shoulders of the housekeeper, but she was so unused to falsehood, that for her life she could not bring herself to the task.

"I'll get rid o' that old cat; been here too long," he continued. "Thinks I can't get along without her, but I'll show her; won't have any strikers in my camp. What difference does it make to you, anyway? I'll fix things up all nice, you know; have reg'lar justice o' peace, minister, alderman, or some other chap in, you know; tie the knot all right. I say, it's all right—he says it's all right—you say it's all right, what's anybody else's business, hey? I call you Mrs. Senator Bumblebig, introduce you to all my friends as m' wife, nobody 'spites it; it's all right, ain't it? Who says 'tain't?"

"No, no, I can never consent to such a thing!"

"Never consent!" and the senator straightened himself back in the chair and stared.

"No, no! it is impossible!"

"Blazes! what's impossible?" he cried, roughly.

"I could not bring myself to become your wife even if you were a free man; I do not feel the affection that a wife should feel for her husband!"

"Fection be blowed! Don't care two cents for 'fection; I'm going to have you whether you like it or not, an' that is all there is 'bout it!"

This was a revelation with a vengeance.

"You do not know what you are doing, or you would never dare to say such a thing to me!" the girl cried, indignantly, all the hot blood within her form leaping in wrath at the indignity.

"Don't I know w'at I'm doin'? Well, I guess I do!" he retorted. "You needn't think because I have got a bottle or two of wine on board that I am off my balance, 'cos if you do you never made a greater mistake in your life. I know w'at I'm 'bout, an' I know who you are, too, Helen Waybit!"

The girl started in amazement as the senator pronounced the name by which she had so long been known.

"Aha!" he cried, in drunken glee; "I fetched the bull's-eye first time, I reckon! See here, now, my gentle gazelle! You musn't put on any airs with me, 'cos I know you. Why, if you had a bit of the right spirit 'bout you, you would go down on your marrow-bones and thank me for giving you the chance to come in here. You'll be safe here, for no one would dream of looking for Helen Waybit in the palatial mansion o' Senator Bumblebig. Biggest chance on record for you, and all the *Herald* advertisements in the world wouldn't set anybody on the right scent."

Now the girl understood how the senator had guessed at her name. She had been advertised, and the description was accurate enough, combined with the knowledge he had gained from her, to enable him to guess she was the person sought.

"Take it easy, my dear," he continued. "I don't want to know what you've done—don't care two cents whether it's robbery, murder, or what. It's all right; you're safe here—perfectly safe, an' if the detectives should hunt you up, I'll buy 'em off; nothin' short of an army can take you out o' here. You shall be a queen—reg'lar queen, an' all I ask, m' dear little darling duck, is for you to love me jes' a little."

And with considerable trouble he rose to his feet, as with the idea of approaching the girl.

She was quick to take the alarm.

"Do not come near me," she cried, in an agony of fear, "or I will scream for assistance."

"Ha, ha, ha! Well, that's a good joke!" he replied, in drunken mirth. "You could scream for a week in this room and no one would hear you; that's the reason you were put up here. I

didn't think you would be fool enough to refuse my offer, but I am allers prepared for the worst; an' now, since you are going to be ugly, I will jes' show you how ugly I can be when I get my mad up. From this time forth you shall be a prisoner in this 'dential room; an' you sha'n't have anything to eat or drink until you make up your mind to accept my offer. I'll starve the devil out o' you. In three days you'll be glad enough to do anything. Jes' you put that in your pipe and smoke it!"

Then, with unsteady steps, the old rascal retreated, passed out into the hall and locked the door behind him, leaving Helen a prey to the wildest apprehensions.

CHAP. ER XXIII.

TWO WILLS.

In a sumptuously-furnished office on Broad street, near Market, in the city of Philadelphia, sat a massive-framed, gray-haired gentleman, whose appearance declared him to be a man of power and position.

It is not necessary for the purpose of our story to give his name in full, for with a single slight episode only is he connected, so we will simply call him Mr. D., and say that both as a lawyer and a statesman he has a national reputation.

He had just arrived at the office and was looking over his morning mail when the negro in attendance brought in a card with the statement that the gentleman desired a personal interview with Mr. D. on important business.

The great lawyer's time was so taken up that it was not an easy matter to gain access to him, as ordinary clients were always received by his partners in the outer offices.

"Edmund Mordaunt, M. D.," said the lawyer, reading the inscription upon the card. "Mordaunt? Mordaunt? I don't remember any one by that name. Are you sure, Joe, that he wants to see me in person? Hasn't he confounded me with the firm?"

"No, sah, I guess not; for when he said he wanted to see you in 'ticular, I done ax him if one ob de odder gemmens wouldn't do, and he said dat dey wouldn't—dat it was Mister D. he wanted fur to see."

"Show him in; it looks like business."

In a few moments the negro ushered in the applicant.

"Mr. Mordaunt" was a young gentleman of good appearance, faultlessly attired, and with a shrewd, intelligent look.

"Mr. D., you will pardon me, I trust, for my urgent request to see you in person, but I am interested in some legal matters upon which I desire to obtain the best possible legal advice."

The lawyer bowed at the implied compliment, and waved the visitor to a chair.

The gentleman sat down, drew out his pocket-book and selected a fifty-dollar bill from among some other notes.

"I am not really judge enough of these matters to be aware of what such advice is worth, but here are fifty dollars to start on, an' if in your judgment, when you understand the circumstances, that is not enough, I will gladly pay more."

The lawyer nodded graciously as he accepted the bill; great man as he was and wealthy, still he dearly loved money, and this prompt way of doing business pleased him.

"Proceed, sir; I shall be pleased to do what I can for you."

The other drew a large envelope from his breast-pocket, took from it a folded legal-looking document and handed it to the lawyer.

"A will, eh?" Mr. D. observed, as he unfolded the paper and glanced at it.

The other nodded.

"A copy of the original document, I presume, as I perceive it is in one handwriting, signatures and all."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, what information do you desire?"

"Is the will all right—executed in due form, no flaws in it?"

"I'll run it over—it seems to be." Then the lawyer read aloud, skipping a little here and there: "I, Mary Ann Brown,—not the right name, I presume?"

"Oh, yes."

"Uncommon appellation! 'Being of sound mind, etc., etc., last will, etc., etc., further expenses to be paid, etc.; to my son, by my first marriage, John Smith, Junior, the sum of ten thousand dollars—Fourth National Bank stock—invested for his benefit—interest to be paid to him—principal to be divided among his grandchildren, or in the event of no issue to go to—Timbuctoo Missionary Society. Balance of my estate to be turned into cash and one-quarter of the sum to my dear young relative by marriage and esteemed friend, Sarah Brown; another quarter to my relative by marriage and confidential man of business, Thomas Brown; the remainder to be divided into ten equal parts—Home for Incurables—Foreign Missionary Society, etc., etc.' Well, I must say that this is pretty rough on John Smith, Junior."

"Is the will all right?—will it stand?—can it be contested?"

"Most certainly! there never lived a lawyer yet with skill enough to draw a will that couldn't be contested."

"But successfully, I mean."

"That is a horse of another color; the document is not drawn as carefully as it might have been, and is somewhat clumsily arranged; still the meaning is perfectly plain. I presume that John Smith, Junior, is likely to be the contesting party?"

"Yes."

"Well, while the document is, on the face of it, decidedly unjust, yet the law distinctly holds that one has the right to do with his own pretty much as he likes, within certain bounds, of course; the bequest of the ten thousand dollars to be held in trust acts as an estoppel on John Smith, Junior, unless he can prove that his mother was not of sound mind or was unduly influenced in the making of this will."

"But is it properly executed—witnessed, etc.?"

"Two witnesses, I see; the law in this State requires—"

"It is not in this State; the property is in New York State."

"Two witnesses are all that are required. Did the witnesses know the contents of the paper before they affixed their signatures to it, or was it merely stated to them that it was Mrs. Brown's will?"

"The paper was read to them at the lady's request."

"That is a strong point in favor of the will, as it shows that there was no design of keeping the matter a secret, and they would be able of course to testify in regard to the lady's condition—that she was all right and knew what she was doing."

"There is not the slightest doubt in regard to that, as a hundred witnesses can testify."

"Well, as I said before, it is rough on John Smith, Junior, but I don't see how he can help himself, and if he should be unwise enough to show fight, the Timbuctoo Society and the rest of them would come down on him like a pack of wildcats."

"Now here is a second document on which I want your opinion, but before you examine it let me explain in regard to this property. Mrs. Brown, when Mrs. Smith and a widow with a good-sized boy, yet and married Brown, then a very rich man. One child, a girl, was the issue of that marriage, but she only lived a few days. Brown died suddenly; no will was found, and his widow came into the property—the property devised by this will which you have just examined."

"I see."

"Now look at this," and the seeker after knowledge handed the other paper to the lawyer.

"Last will and testament of James Brown," read the lawyer. "Oho! This is getting interesting, and it is dated two years previous to the time the will of Mrs. Brown was executed."

"Exactly! About six months before he died. This paper was hidden away and only came to light recently."

"But the estate was settled up in accordance with the law, in such cases made and provided, just as if this will was not in existence?"

"No one suspected that there was such a paper."

"A complicated case; ground enough to found a romance upon," commented the lawyer, as he unfolded the paper and proceeded to examine it.

"To my wife, Mary Ann Brown, all the etc., etc., of which I die possessed, to have and hold as long as she lives, and at her death the entire estate to go to my only child, my daughter—the name is blotted so that I cannot make it out."

"It is so in the original document."

"That's strange!"

"Is that paper of any weight in a court of law?"

"Certainly; it is short, but right to the point; there could be no quibbling about its meaning. It is properly signed and properly witnessed."

"Both the witnesses are dead."

"Were they well known men, so that their signatures could be proved?"

"Yes."

"That is all that is required."

"What effect does the first will have on the second?"

"It renders it of the same value as a sheet of waste paper. Mrs. Brown could not convey the property in which she only had a life interest."

"But the daughter, evidently a child by some former marriage—no one knew that such a girl was in existence."

"He did, evidently, or else he would not have left her his property."

"Then the heirs mentioned in the second will could not dispute the property with the heir mentioned in the first?"

"Not with any hope of success, for there is an appearance of fraud on the face of it. It looks as if malice had kept back the first will."

"Then, when the first will is produced, it is the duty of the executors to search for the daughter?"

"Precisely! and until the child is discovered, or her heirs are found, the estate remains in *statu quo*."

"Suppose the girl is dead, leaving no heirs, or that no trace of her can be found?"

"The widow then inherits, as the heir of her dead child; but let me caution you, my dear sir, not to believe that there is any possibility of that. Experience has taught me that the heirs of large estates rarely die, until they come into their property, or, if they do, they leave a lot of heirs behind them."

"Well, sir, that is all," said the visitor, folding the documents and carefully replacing them in his pocket. "Is the fifty sufficient for your trouble?"

"Yes, sir, quite so; and any further information you desire I shall be happy to give you."

"I am very much obliged," remarked the gentleman, bowing himself out.

"A deep chap," muttered the lawyer; "but who does he represent in the case? And the names are real, too—oh, no! not much! If the estate is a big one, I shouldn't mind having a finger in that pie."

"Mr. Mordaunt's" brow was gloomy as he walked directly to the depot and took a train for New York.

"Now, then, what is my game?" he murmured, as the iron horse bore him swiftly toward New York. "And this daughter—is my guess true? If it is, I hold her in my hand, a trump card, ready to play at the critical moment, and what can keep me from winning?"

CHAPTER XXIV.

CANARY NEGOTIATES.

MR. GAYAWAY MUTTLEBUD sat in his office, a small apartment in Fourteenth street, near Union Square, his feet elevated upon a table, and puffing away vigorously at a huge cigar.

The private detective was not in a pleasant mood and he was giving vent to his thoughts in words after the semi-theatrical style common to the man, who, although possessed of a certain shrewdness, was a great braggart.

"Well, now, if this don't beat the Dutch you can take my boots!" he ejaculated, blowing out a great cloud of tobacco smoke. "Eleven days—eleven precious days I have been on this trail, and nary scent of hide nor hair can I get. And yet she is here in New York, somewhere. I would be ready to take my oath that she is; but where, that is the question before the meeting. Where is she hiding, and why don't she come out and show herself, or is she afraid that there will be trouble on account of her running away?"

The blundering boaster had little suspicion that he was entirely to blame for the girl's flight, and that, if he had kept his threats to himself, he would have had no difficulty in securing the game.

"This is about as mysterious an affair as I ever got mixed up in," he continued. "What on earth does the Englishman want of the girl? and he's so durned close-mouthed, too, that a man can't get an idea out of him. It is for something important, of course, or else he wouldn't be throwing his money around in this loose way. It has cost him a pretty penny already, but he don't seem to mind it! 'Hang the expenses!' he says; 'find the girl; that is all I want,' and I've done my level best, but, somehow, I can't work the trick. I thought the personal advertisements in the newspapers would fetch the gal, or, at least, reach somebody that knew something about her, for if she is in the city she must be staying with somebody, and I pitched it pretty strong in the advertisement of how big money would be paid for reliable information, but here's a good ten days gone and nary a bite."

Just then the door opened slowly and a benevolent-looking old gentleman, attired in a well-worn suit of black, peered into the apartment—such a man as nine out of every ten people meeting him in the street would take to be a leading light in some quiet old church.

Muttlebud, however, knew the man of old, for he instantly accosted him.

"Hallo, Papa Canary, what do you want? Come in; don't be frightened; I ain't got any of the detectives here from the Central Office to pounce upon you."

"Oh, my dear Mr. Muttiebud, you will have your joke!" the old man replied, closing the door behind him, at the same time taking a rapid survey of the apartment to make sure that what the detective said was correct. "I am not afraid of the detectives; why should I be? I am living on the square, now—have entirely shook my vile associates."

"Yes; until a good chance comes to make a big haul. You turn honest! Yes, when the world comes to an end."

"Ah, you will joke just so much; but I have come to see you on a little matter of business."

"Oh, no; you can't rope me into anything. Go sing to some other flat!"

"You wrong me so much that you make my heart bleed!" whined the old fellow, trying hard to squeeze out a tear.

"Oh, stow that gammon! What do you want?"

"A little advertisement in the paper attracted my attention."

"Oho!" and the detective took his feet from the table; do you know anything about the party?"

"Well, I am not exactly sure. I happened to make the acquaintance of a young girl whose first name was Helen on a train in Jersey about a couple of weeks ago when I was coming up to the city, and she answers to the description that you gave in your advertisement."

"Two weeks ago! That was the time."

"Well, what is there to this thing, anyway? What do you want of the girl?"

"Have you got her?"

"Oh, no."

"No use to lie about the matter, you know," continued the detective. "If you have got her you had better own right up, for if you are inclined to be ugly about it, now that I have got a clew, I will be down on you like a thousand of bricks!"

"My dear Mr. Muttiebud, you are only wasting breath by threatening me," responded the old man, oily as ever, and yet with a sort of snarl, showing his teeth, plain proof that he could offer battle if necessary. "Just look at the matter yourself; I am no chicken; entirely too old a bird to be caught with chaff. If I had been mixed up with anything crooked in this business do you suppose I would have been fool enough to come to you? Do you suppose I couldn't have sent somebody else to have found out what little game you was up to? Now, I propose to deal honest with you. The girl was in my hands—in my house, but she isn't now, although if you can afford to make it an object to me it is just possible I may be able to find her for you."

"Canary, if you have harmed that girl it will be the worst day's work you ever did in your life, and you know better than any one else that you have had some ugly jobs recorded against you in your time!" cried Muttiebud, in his blustering way.

"Oh, my dear Mr. Detective, you are not half so acute a man as you think yourself to be," responded the old rogue, contemptuously.

"Do you think that if I had harmed the girl I would 'give myself away' by admitting to anybody that I knew anything about her? Why, you must think that I am a regular donkey."

"No, no; the man who picks you up for a flat will get badly fooled."

"To business; for my time is worth too much to be wasted. What is the information worth?"

"I ain't sure that your bird is the one I want."

"She came from South Jersey—somewhere back of Freehold."

"Blazes!" muttered Muttiebud, to himself; "no wonder I missed her. Wasn't she a sly one, though, to cut across the country to Freehold, while I was cooling my heels around the depot at Long Branch?"

"The girl excited my suspicions because she kept such a close mouth about herself, for I couldn't get a word out of her in regard to her folks, where she lived, or why she had left her home; but the fact that she was so mum about these matters, coupled with the circumstance that she hadn't the least bit of baggage, made me suspect that she had given leg-bail and was running away from home. I suspected, too, that the name she gave me was not her own, and from the peculiar way in which, when we stopped at a station, she watched the passengers board the train—a sort of frightened look upon her face as though she was afraid that some of them were coming after her—rather led me to think that she had done something and was afraid of being pursued and captured."

"What name did she give?"

"How much is that information worth?" Canary demanded, with a dry chuckle and a wink.

"Oh, I don't know that; not much of anything, I reckon. All I wanted to know for was to see if it was the party I wanted."

"She answered to the description exactly—face, figure and dress; her first name was Helen, and she was on the train from Freehold up for New York, on the morning succeeding the night when, according to your advertisement, she disappeared from her home."

"Now then, if she fills the bill, and you want to negotiate, well and good, say so, and we'll get to work; if you don't mean business, spit it out, and I will shake the dust from my feet and depart."

Muttiebud looked puzzled for a moment; not a quick-witted man, despite all his brags, he was no match for the old scamp who for many a long year had comfortably supported himself by "trick and device."

"Well, how much do you want?"

"What's your offer?"

"How can I tell what your information is worth until I know what it is?"

"You are very anxious to see what cards I hold, eh?"

"If I have got to buy your hand it is only fair I should have a sight at it to be able to tell something about its value."

"I can put you on the track of the girl."

"That is what I want."

"I made her acquaintance on the train that morning, as I told you, and when I found out the suspicious circumstances that surrounded her, I came to the conclusion that she was just the kind of girl I was looking for; she was fresh-faced, good-looking, innocent-appearing; one to look at her would never have suspected she had been up to any mischief, and so I reckoned that if I could work her into a sort of decoy-duck I would make a heap of money."

"I see; get her into wealthy families, and have her find out where the valuables were kept, so that you and your pals could go for them."

"Ah, Mr. Muttiebud, you must have associated with very bad men to have such evil ideas," responded Canary, with a grin.

"Oh, I know your favorite game, there's half a dozen girls in State's Prison now, sent there on your account, but you always manage to get clear."

"Innocent man, you know! Well, I got the girl to my home all right, but in an hour or two she contrived to slip through my fingers, and I tell you she's a deep one or else she couldn't have done it. I'm a kind of a superstitious man, and I didn't try to find her, for I had an idea she wouldn't bring me any luck, for she escaped from a trap that never failed to hold its bird before; but when I saw your advertisement I thought there might be a few dollars in the thing, and so I set out to hunt her up, and I succeeded. Now, if you want to trade, I'm your man!"

"How much? Name your price."

"A thousand dollars, say."

"Oh, my principal wouldn't stand that."

"That's the lowest cent."

"He won't give it."

At that moment the Englishman, Garrowcroft, entered the room.

CHAPTER XXV.

CATCHING A TARTAR.

CANARY, gifted with a scamp's quick comprehension, the moment the Englishman came in guessed that the new-comer was the man interested, so he resolved, with instant decision, to ignore the detective and do business with the principal.

"Ah! this is the gentleman, I presume, who is interested in the Helen Waybit matter? How fortunate it is that I am able to afford him valuable information."

Muttiebud scowled and gave a little gasp; the cool impudence of the other had almost taken his breath away; but the unsuspicious Englishman naturally supposed that the detective had spoken of him to the stranger, so immediately replied:

"Yes, sir; I am the party."

"I don't think we can do anything, sir, with this here cove," Muttiebud hastened to remark. "He wants too steep a price for his information."

Canary sighed and rolled up his eyes in protest against this insinuation.

"How much?" demanded Garrowcroft, sharply.

"A thousand dollars."

"Oh, by Jove! Why don't you ask for the bank of England, you know? Now, if you were to say a hundred, I think you would be deuced well paid."

"Not for such information as I can give; that is, of course, if you are interested in the girl and are anxious to recover her."

"Won't you take less?" asked Garrowcroft.

"Not a penny! Oh, I could not—I really could not, in justice to myself, for I have been to considerable trouble and expense in the matter, and I can assure you that if you decline to pay my price and so have to go without my information, the chances are a hundred to one you won't find the girl, even if you spent ten years in the search."

"Gammon!" cried the detective.

"Fact!" Canary replied.

The Englishman had taken a good look at the old man, as if trying to make out what kind of a customer he had to deal with, and now he spoke.

"This gentleman may be right," he said, addressing Muttiebud. "Perhaps I would save money and time by paying the thousand. Will you wait five minutes, while I talk the matter over with my friend in the inner room?"

This to the old man.

"Certainly! Delighted to oblige," replied Canary, satisfied that his demand would be met.

The Englishman and the detective withdrew into the little inner office.

"Who is this old rascal, and what does he know about the girl?" asked Garrowcroft, the moment they were alone.

Briefly Muttiebud told all he knew of Papa Canary and his "interesting" family, who spent more time in jail than they did out of it; then he

related the story told by the old man in relation to the girl.

"How can we be sure that he hasn't got the girl in his possession now?" Garrowcroft queried.

"Heaven help her then, if she is!" Muttiebud exclaimed. "If she has been two weeks in the hands of this old scoundrel and his crew she is a poor ruined creature!"

The Englishman ground his teeth in a rage.

"If it is so, may the Lord have mercy on all of the gang, for I'll have the deepest and direst vengeance that money can buy, and if I can't stretch the law far enough to satisfy me, then I'll take the law into my own hands."

The speaker was greatly excited, and the detective marveled at the emotion which he displayed.

"I don't think, governor, that it is likely. He wouldn't have dared to come forward if he had harmed the girl."

"True, very true! Oh, I'll give him his thousand dollars, the atrocious scoundrel! Do you think he will tell me the same story he told you about the girl?"

Muttiebud did not exactly comprehend what the other was driving at, but he replied that he had no doubt he would.

The two returned to the outer room.

"Sir, I will not conceal from you that this gentleman,"—and he nodded to the detective—"strongly advises me not to give you the sum you ask, but if you convince me that you can arrange matters so that I can put my hands upon the girl, I think we can come to a satisfactory agreement."

"No doubt, for I can do that."

"Proceed, sir; relate to me all the particulars of the affair, so that I may judge."

Canary fell immediately into the trap the Englishman had laid. Despite his shrewdness, this time he was tricked, for he related in full how he had encountered the girl on the train, how he had carried her to his house, and how she had disappeared from the apartment in which she had been placed, suppressing, of course, the particulars of how he had drugged her, intending to make her his slave.

"And when you saw the reward offered for Helen Waybit, you suspected that it was the girl whom you had harbored in your house, and you then hunted her up?"

"Exactly."

"And you can tell us where she is now?"

"I can, provided you fork over a thousand dollars."

"I think twenty-five will pay you very well."

Canary stared; this was a discount with a vengeance.

"Twenty-five devils!" he cried, in a rage, for he began to have an idea that the cool Englishman was amusing himself at his expense. "Say, Muttiebud, tell this gentleman I am not the kind of a man to be played with."

"Sir, I assure you you are the very last article in the world I would select for a plaything. I am quite in earnest in this matter; I will give you twenty-five dollars and no more."

"I refuse—that is all there is about that; I refuse, and I reckon you won't be able to find the girl without my help if you search for a year!"

Canary made a movement toward the door, but the broad shouldered Englishman anticipated him and blocked the way.

"Not quite so fast, my friend; I've not got through with you yet."

"What do you mean?" demanded Canary, much more annoyed, though, than alarmed, for it took a great deal to frighten this veteran law-breaker.

"You are a donkey, sir, for by your own confession it is plain you entrapped the girl into going to your house, for if she had had any idea of your character or the nature of the den over which you preside, she never would have gone. You have admitted that the girl was with you two weeks ago, and since that time she has never been seen, so the inference is clear that you had something to do with her disappearance; so I propose to have you arrested on a charge of abduction. If you haven't harmed the girl, and know where she is, you can very easily get out of the scrape by either producing her or giving information so that she can be found. Mr. Muttiebud, have the kindness to put yourself in communication with the superintendent of police with the telephone."

Canary was far too shrewd a rascal not to comprehend that he was in a tight place. The chances were a thousand to one that some one of the neighbors had seen the girl enter his house with him and would testify to that effect, and he well knew his bad character would weigh heavily against him; so, like a wise man, realizing that he had caught a Tartar, he submitted gracefully to the inevitable.

"Well, gents," he remarked, forcing a sickly smile, "I guess you have got me this time, and seeing that it is you, I will take your offer of twenty-five for the information."

"But we don't pay the money, you see, until we know that everything is all square!" put in the detective, eager to have a voice in the mat-

ter, and rather nettled to think that his principal had devised a scheme which had succeeded in getting old Canary "into a hole" when his wits had not been equal to the task.

"Of course; I don't object to anything in reason."

And then the old bird of prey related how, after the advertisement in relation to the girl had appeared, he came to the conclusion that the Helen Home whom he had met on the train was the young girl advertised for under the name of Helen Waybit, and thinking there was some money in the matter he had gone to work to hunt her up.

A single clew only had he—the letter, which he explained the girl had left behind when she had quitted the house—which tale neither of the listeners believed, for they had no doubt the letter had been stolen from the girl. This letter Canary yielded to Mr. Garrowcroft. In this note was an appointment to meet the girl at the obelisk in Central Park. So, up to the Park Canary went, and after careful inquiry he discovered that a girl answering to the description of Helen Home, or Helen Waybit, had been arrested in the Park, and was afterward taken to the court in Fifty-fourth street. To the court he went, and after a little trouble succeeded in discovering that she had been fined, her fine paid by Senator Bumblebig, and with that gentleman she had departed.

Keeping to the track like a detective-hound, Canary at length discovered that the girl was an inmate of the senator's house at Tarrytown, acting as his secretary.

"We can decide in regard to the truth of this story within an hour or two. Sir, we will have to trouble you to accompany us to the house of this senator."

Canary made no objection, and inside of five minutes the three were on their way.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A DISCOVERY.

AFTER the interview between the two young men in relation to the Plantagenet estate, as related in a preceding chapter, social intercourse between them was almost entirely broken off, for Denby was of that peculiar, open nature which cannot conceal its likes and dislikes, and after having offered to make Richard a free gift of the princely sum of one hundred thousand dollars, without conditions, to have him declare that he thought he ought to have a million, was the assurance of insolence, and particularly so as the young Englishman had insinuated that if his demand was not complied with there would be trouble.

Denby had consulted his lawyers, but, as before, they laughed at the idea of Mrs. Plantagenet making a will without their knowledge, and advised the young man not to pay any attention to such a ridiculous surmise.

Under these circumstances there was not much sociability among the three who now dwelt in the family mansion, although the girl, Viola, tried to be as agreeable as possible, but with her quick womanly instinct she saw that the gulf between the two young men was growing wider and wider each day, and understood that it would be the height of folly for her to attempt to interfere in the matter.

One day after dinner, just in the dusk of the evening, all three happened to be in the parlor together. It was a purely accidental meeting, for neither of the young men courted the other's society.

Denby was seated close by the window, looking over one of the evening papers, when Viola had coaxed Richard to come in and turn the leaves of a new piece of music which she wished to try, and she had got all through with the playing before either of them discovered Denby's presence—or at least so they said.

"Oh, I'm tired of music!" Viola exclaimed, abruptly. "I feel just like reading to-night. Denby, won't you have the book-cases unlocked so that I can have a book?"

"The book-cases are not locked."

"Oh, yes they are, for I went for a book this afternoon when you were out and couldn't get one."

"Well, I didn't know it, and I can assure you it was not by my orders."

"Larry said he supposed it was, for you had the key."

"I had the key? What nonsense!" Denby exclaimed, impatiently. "Call Larry, please; he has made some mistake."

Viola summoned the servant, who was the waiter of the house, and when he came the young master questioned him.

"Indeed, sir, I thought that you locked the book-cases, for I saw the key on the bureau in your room."

"Absurd! Why should I lock the book-cases?"

"Deed, sir, I don't know, but the cases are locked, sir, and I am certain I saw the key in one of the vases on your bureau."

"Well, I can't imagine who locked them—for I certainly did not, and no one should meddle with the library arrangements without orders."

"I didn't, sir!" protested the servant, quickly.

"Oh, I have no doubt of your innocence; it

is a small matter, though, not worth speaking about. If you want a book, Viola, Larry can get you one as long as he knows where the key is."

"What shall I send for?"

"Have you read any of the Waverley novels lately?" Richard asked, and she answered with a shake of the head.

"Try one of them," he suggested.

"Which one?"

"Oh, it doesn't matter, let chance decide; let Larry bring you whichever one he thinks proper."

"It will be as good as a lottery, won't it? Well, Larry, if you will be good enough to go to the library and bring me a book; you choose for me; it doesn't matter which one, any of the Waverley novels."

"Yes, miss," and the man departed.

"Here's a chance to win a pair of gloves!" cried the girl. "Richard, I will bet you that you cannot name the book he will bring."

"That is a safe wager, for the chances are all in your favor, and I beg leave to decline."

She bantered him about his lack of courage until the servant returned.

He had chosen "Rob Roy," delivered the book and then retreated.

"Oh, I'm afraid that I shall not enjoy this very much!" Viola declared, with the charming pout which became her beautiful face so well. "If I remember rightly, it is all about fighting, and horrid, rough, savage people who talk in the most outlandish way."

"You haven't any Scotch blood in your veins, it is evident, or you would never dare to asperse the Highland dialect after that fashion!" Richard declared. "But you can look at the pictures if you don't like the dialogue, for the illustrations are beautiful."

The edition was a magnificent one, large in size and splendidly illustrated.

"Here goes for the pictures, then!" The girl opened the book, and as she did so she exposed to view a folded paper which had been snugly hid between the leaves.

"Oh, my! what's this?" burst from Viola's lips.

"A surprise party," suggested Richard.

Denby looked up from his newspaper, his attention attracted by the exclamations.

"What is it?" he asked.

"A letter, or a business paper of some kind, hidden away in this volume."

"That's odd!" he remarked.

"Examine it and see what it is," said Richard.

Viola turned the paper over; there was an inscription on the other side, and she read it aloud:

"The last will and testament of Matilda Van Tromp Plantagenet."

There was a dead silence in the room for a moment, and the three gazed upon each other with wondering eyes.

The girl was the first to speak.

"What a strange place to put a will!"

"Oh, no; I have read of just such things before," observed Richard.

"Yes, I have read of such a thing in a romance, but I thought it was all pure fiction, and I never believed that such things did happen in reality."

"Where else do the writers draw their inspiration but from real life?"

"Open the paper and read it, Viola, and then we will know whether it is what it purports to be or not," Denby observed, not at all affected by this mysterious and unexpected discovery, except that it set him to watching Richard's countenance very intently.

"I beg your pardon, Denby, for interfering, but don't you think it would be better for you to examine the paper and make yourself master of its contents before you give it to the world? You are the head of the family, and by right entitled to examine any such paper as this before any one else."

Denby's lips curled slightly, and there was a scornful look in his eyes.

"Richard, you are really growing magnanimous," he remarked. "Now, see how I have wronged you! I never should have been willing to believe that you would yield to any such generous sentiments; on the contrary, I would have been certain that you would not scruple to take advantage of any and all means to advance your fortunes. If this is my mother's will, it is, doubtless, the paper of which you spoke the other day when last we conversed upon the subject—the will of which you knew something and I knew nothing, strange as that may appear to any unprejudiced observer. If your statement of the contents of that paper was correct, then both you and Viola have decidedly more interest in the matter than I, therefore I prefer that one of you should ascertain what the document really does contain. If you place it in my hands and it strikes the blow at my fortune which you predicted, I might be capable, if I were a wicked man, of attempting to suppress it altogether."

"Oh, for shame, Denby, to speak in that way!" Viola exclaimed, her face flushing. "I can assure you have no reason for doing so. Richard

and myself have the utmost confidence in your honor."

"I echo Viola's sentiments!" Richard hastened to add. "I have the most perfect trust in your integrity, and as I consider you the only proper person to examine this paper, I must decline to do so first."

Viola brought the document and gave it into Denby's hands, saying:

"You must read it, for no one else will."

In the last few weeks the experience of years seemed to have come to the young man. He had become distrustful, and had learned to trust more to the actions of those by whom he was surrounded than to their words. He was satisfied that Richard Plantagenet was a crafty schemer who would not hesitate long before using any means which he thought would attain the end he sought.

In this mysterious appearance of the will he suspected a trap. His mother, of late years, had not been much given to reading, and he thought that a book in the library would be the most unlikely place in the world for her to deposit such an important document as her will; so it was with every sense on the alert to guard against trickery that he unfolded the paper.

He read it through carefully, and then looking up, commanded:

"Listen, while I read."

And he proceeded to clearly rehearse the contents of the paper aloud.

The reader is already familiar with the character of this paper, for it was the same as the one the stranger had submitted to the Philadelphia lawyer as the will of Mrs. Brown.

"But this will rob you of your fortune, Denby!" Viola exclaimed, her eyes opening wide.

"Yes, if the document is a genuine one."

"Oh, but we can settle the matter among ourselves, since we alone are interested. We can pay these sums given to the charitable institutions, without making the will public, and we can amicably arrange to divide the remainder. I am sure neither Viola nor myself wish to reduce you to a bare annuity, Denby," was Richard's declaration.

"The document is not worth the paper upon which it is written!" and Denby threw the will disdainfully to Richard. "Take it! do with it what you please. It is a fraud, and I will not be beaten by trickery!"

And in heat the young man quitted the apartment.

"It will be war, then, after all!" Richard remarked, frowningly, "and war to the bitter end I will make it, too!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

OUT IN THE NIGHT.

THE housekeeper was pale, but stern resolve was stamped on her features, when she made her appearance from the wardrobe after the departure of the senator.

"You see, my dear, it is exactly as I told you. The old brute has thrown off the mask now; he thinks you are completely in his power, and is reckless in regard to the consequences."

"But surely he would never dare to carry out his threats?"

"Most certainly he would! You are here, helpless, a prisoner in his hands, no possible way of escape, apparently, open to you."

"But I would never consent to this infamous marriage—I would appeal to the minister who came to perform the ceremony and denounce this miserable old wretch!"

"Oh, he won't have any real minister. It will only be some rascal dressed up; that is to quiet you, you know, so as to make you believe you are his wife. There's been many a poor, foolish girl lured to her ruin by some rich scoundrel pretending to be in love with her and flattering her vanity by offering to make her his wife. It's an old saying that charity covers a multitude of sins, but if it was said that money covers a host of crimes it would be far more true. What chance would a poor, wronged girl, without money, stand, opposed to this man, backed by both wealth and political influence? He has entrapped you, and he is confident you cannot escape him."

"I will not consent to a marriage, and surely I cannot be forced into one!"

"Why not?"

"I will resist even unto death."

"If he finds you are disposed to be obstinate, he will not use force, but cunning. He will drug your food or drink."

"Oh, horror!" cried the girl, terribly alarmed, for the manner in which she had been dosed by the Canary tribe was still fresh in her memory.

"You are a prisoner here and will not be released until you consent to marry him."

"But you will aid me—you will not see me sacrificed by this inhuman monster!" cried Helen, in imploring accents.

"No, you shall not fall his victim if I can save you."

"It will cost you your place; I did not think of that."

"There isn't the least fear of that; he would find it difficult to get any one to attend to his

house and keep it in the order I do, and he knows it well enough. Besides, I had just as soon go away as not; I have been a saving, prudent woman, and have put by enough to start me nicely in some little business from which I can make a good living. I am sick of this old villain and had rather go away than not."

"But, if the doors are locked, we are both prisoners!"

"Oh, don't fear about that; I have the senator's own pass-key, which will open any door in the house. He dropped it at dinner to-day and I found it after he left the table; it was a lucky chance; the hand of Heaven was in it, for if I had not found the key it would have been a difficult matter for me to have assisted you to-night. As it is I can do so, and no one will be the wiser. Now dress yourself, take off all the things bought with his money and put on your own again; be careful not to take with you a single article which was purchased by him, for he is a mean and petty man despite his wealth and station, and would be capable of having you arrested for theft if he could succeed in overtaking you."

"That would be horrible," murmured the girl, as she disrobed hurriedly, and put on her own garments again.

"He is a malicious monster when aroused, but this time he shall be baffled. Have you any money?"

"Only a little."

"You must have money or else you cannot get along. Here are ten dollars for you," and she took from her pocket some bills and a note securely sealed. "Do you know how to reach Jersey City?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Here is a note to a lady friend of mine who lives there; she keeps a few boarders, and I have asked her to take you for a week or two, while you are looking for something to do. Her address is on the note, and any one will tell you where the street is after you get over the ferry. It will not be necessary for you to explain what has taken place here, or the reason why you were compelled to leave. Perhaps it would be better not to mention this house at all. You can simply say, as I have said in the note, that you are an acquaintance of mine—that you have just come up from the country, and that I have promised to assist you in getting work; nothing more will be necessary. She will receive you and look to me for her pay."

Tears of gratitude stood in Helen's eyes when the housekeeper finished her speech. Surely Heaven was good to her to bring such a friend to her assistance in this her hour of mortal peril.

She stammered forth her thanks, but Mrs. Sparrow turned a deaf ear to the heartfelt words.

"It is my duty, child—my duty to assist you, and I am thankful that we met, for I feel like a Christian woman again."

And now Helen, completely dressed, announced that she was ready.

"I will go on before and see if the coast is clear, for it would spoil all if any one saw you leave the house. I do not think there is much danger, though, for at this hour the servants are either all in their rooms or else congregated in the kitchen."

So the housekeeper went first, unlocked the door which led into the main building—as she had anticipated, the senator had secured it so that the prisoner should not escape—then, after ascertaining that none of the servants were lingering about in the hall, summoned the girl to descend.

They reached the front door and passed out into the darkness of the night without seeing—or being seen—by any one.

The housekeeper had caught up a light shawl and thrown it over her head as a protection against the dews of the night.

"There is very little danger now of our being observed, for the porter's family are almost always indoors at this hour," Mrs. Sparrow said, as they approached the stone lodge which guarded the gate.

Fortune was favoring Helen on this occasion, for they passed by the house, and out through the gate to the road beyond, without detection.

"Now you are tolerably safe," Mrs. Sparrow remarked, drawing a long breath. "You must keep straight on in this road; do not turn either to the right or left, and it will bring you to the depot. There is a train for New York at half-past nine, and you will have plenty of time to catch it. When you reach the city take the cab line at the depot which connects with the Elevated Railway and tell the conductor to let you off at the Cortlandt Street Ferry. You will get there in a couple of hours, and you will find the folks at the boarding-house up for they keep late hours, and seldom go to bed before twelve. I will come down and see you as soon as it is safe, for I am afraid the old demon may suspect that I have had a hand in helping you to escape, and if he does, he is quite capable of setting a watch upon me with the idea that I will be apt to communicate with you after a while; so if you do not either see or hear from me within a week or two you need not be alarmed. I have explained in the letter which I gave you that it

might not be convenient for me to come to Jersey for some little time. I am determined this old scoundrel shall not recapture you, but I have no doubt he will do his best to find out where you have gone. Therefore it will be best for you to keep in the house until I come or write you what to do. He is none too good to put the police on your track with some trumped-up story that you have stolen something from the house. Of course, from what I heard him say I know there is a mystery connected with your life, and he, like all evil-minded brutes, thinks you would be afraid to invoke the assistance of the law to protect you from his persecution, but I cannot bring myself to ink in that way. If you are not a good girl, without cause to be ashamed of anything you have ever done, then I am no judge of human nature."

"It is the truth, Mrs. Sparrow!" replied Helen, earnestly, "and when I have an opportunity I will tell you all of my simple story, and you shall judge for yourself."

"I am satisfied to take your word for it, my dear; but go now, and Heaven bless and watch over you! Do not be a maid, although the road does appear so dark and gloomy; there isn't the least danger, and the chances are that in the mile or so between here and the station you will not meet a single person. I very often go down to the village after nightfall, and it is seldom indeed that I encounter any one either going or coming, so you must not be alarmed. Hurry right along, and when you come to the depot do not go inside, for some one may notice you and so give the old villain a clue. Remain in the neighborhood until the train stops; then get on board and pay your fare to the conductor, and thus baffle pursuit."

Again Helen thanked Mrs. Sparrow with an eloquence which plainly showed the words came straight from her heart; there was a parting embrace and the girl hurried away.

Mrs. Sparrow watched her until her figure vanished in the darkness which veiled the road.

"Well, there's one good deed I have done in my life!" she exclaimed, in a tone of great satisfaction. "I thought my heart had hardened into stone, but I guess it is still flesh and blood after all. Now to return and prepare to face a cold rascal. There will be a precious row kicked up in the morning, but he will get as good as he sends for a me." And she retraced her steps toward the house.

As her tall figure vanished amid the gloom and the sound of her footsteps died away in the distance, three men, all muffled up in dark coarse overcoats and with slouch hats pulled down over their foreheads, came from a clump of bushes by the wayside. They listened for a moment as if to be certain that the housekeeper had no intention of returning, and then with rapid, noiseless steps stole after the girl.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE PURSUIT.

BUMBLEBIG had made up his mind to use decisive and desperate measures with the girl. He had studied her intently during the two weeks that she had been under his roof, and was satisfied that she was not to be tricked so easily as the common, vain, foolish women whom he had hitherto encountered.

Despite the fact that there seemed to be a cloud around her when he had encountered her, and the fact that she was advertised for in a public journal, just as if she were a criminal from justice, yet he saw that she was not disposed to yield a ready consent to his wishes.

When he awoke the next morning—the one which succeeded the night on which he had revealed the nature of his plan to Helen—his first thought was in regard to the best way to break the stubborn spirit manifested by her.

"A little wholesome starvation will be as good as anything, I guess," he murmured, and then he happened to glance at the clock. It was after nine; the senator had overslept himself—a natural result of the violent spree in which he had indulged on the preceding night.

"I will go and see her the first thing," he murmured—"deliver to her my ultimatum. Perhaps, now that she has had time to think it over, she may be inclined to be more reasonable. The female sex are proverbially uncertain; I have known a great number of them to commence by saying 'no,' when, all the while, they intended to wind up by saying 'yes.'"

The senator was trying to deceive himself, for in truth he did not anticipate that she would "weaken," as he would have expressed it.

After his toilet was made, Bumblebig went straight to the young woman's apartment; the door leading from the main building into the wing was locked just as he had left it on the preceding night, and he chuckled as he turned the key in the lock.

"When she attempted to get out this morning she must have been very much astonished to find she couldn't. Just about that time, I guess, she came to the conclusion that she had got a man to deal with who meant every word he said, and that is the kind of a man I am!"

He proceeded smilingly along the entry to the door of her room, knocked, then waited for the answer. As none came he knocked again, and then, rather mystified by the silence, he opened

the door, which was unlocked, and entered the room.

His rage, when he discovered it to be empty—that the bird had flown, is more easily imagined than described.

The unruffled appearance of the bed, showing that it had not been occupied, was a clear proof that the girl had got away during the preceding evening, yet how she could have succeeded in passing the locked door was a mystery.

"Oh, I have it!" he cried, in the most violent rage; "there is a traitor in the camp, but who? who? Who would dare to brave my anger? Mrs. Sparrow! She is the only one in the house who would dare to do it, and there is a possibility that she has got a key which will unlock that outer door."

He hurried down-stairs immediately, and had all the servants summoned, much to their wonder.

"My secretary has absconded, like a thief in the night," he declared. "She ran away to avoid the consequences of her crimes. I discovered last evening that she has been stealing ever since she came into this house; she confessed as much to me when I charged her with her crime, and begged me to have mercy upon her. I told her I would think the matter over, and would decide this morning, so I locked the door leading into the wing so that she could not escape in the night. But she has managed to elude my vigilance. Some one has unlocked that door and locked it again with a false key, and so permitted this vile little wretch, who turned to bite the hand that fed her, to escape. But I shall pursue her instantly, and give warning to the police. I am not to be robbed with impunity!"

As Mrs. Sparrow had foreseen, the old knave was going to play the old game of false accusation.

"Now, then," he continued, "some one of you people here have helped this girl; somebody has got a key to that door! I don't want to be hard on you; all of you have been with me a good while, and have found me a kind and indulgent master, and I don't wish to send any of you to prison, as I shall have to, unless the guilty party owns right up. I do not suppose, of course, that whoever let the girl out had any idea of what she had been up to. She may have told a pitiful story, and I understand how such an artful hussy could impose on any one very easily, because she fooled me, and I flatter myself I am not a man who is easily fooled, either. Come, make a clean breast of it so I can get on the girl's track, and I will look over the matter this time and say no more about it."

But not a soul spoke; they only gazed at each other with inquiring faces.

"I know who it is, now!" shouted the senator, beginning to get frightfully enraged. "I'll give the guilty party five minutes to speak!" and he took out his watch.

The servants only stared more surprisedly than before, very much amazed, but not particularly alarmed, for they were all accustomed to their master's violent fits, which rarely lasted long or did much damage.

"Five minutes are up!"

No one stirred.

"Mrs. Sparrow, you are the one who let that girl out!" the senator cried, shaking his finger menacingly at the housekeeper.

"Well, sir, if you believe so, I do not suppose it will be of any use for me to attempt to deny it; so, if you will have the kindness to pay me my wages, I will go," replied the woman, in the calmest manner possible, dropping a courtesy.

"No, you won't! Not until you tell me where that girl has gone!" fairly howled Bumblebig.

"If you know, sir, how to make any one tell what they do not know, it is more than I do."

"I'll have you in a police court!"

"I am ready to go, sir, as soon as you are," and the woman did not seem to be in the least disturbed.

Bumblebig ground his teeth in rage. His threats were impotent and every one knew it.

"See here, now, Mrs. Sparrow: I don't want to do anything unpleasant," he remarked, making a great effort to control his temper, "but I must make an example of that wretched girl. It isn't the money she stole; it is the idea of her doing such a thing after I fairly picked her out of the gutter. I'll give you fifty dollars if you'll tell me where that girl has gone."

And the senator pulled out a big roll of bills to give due emphasis to the offer.

"Lor, sir, I'd like to take the money, but it would be only robbing you. How should I know anything about the girl? She was a kind of a haughty, proud thing, and never took much notice of anybody."

"Get out the carriage!" Bumblebig roared, satisfied that he couldn't extract any information from Mrs. Sparrow by either threats or bribes.

When the coach came the senator hurried down to the station.

The depot master was very civil, indeed, but not the least information could he give in regard to the fugitive. In fact, he was quite certain she had not taken any train the pre-

vious evening unless she had gone before seven o'clock.

"No, it was after seven, for I saw her at the house at about seven."

"Then I am certain, sir, that she did not take a train at this station, for I have noticed every one who got on and off. I came on duty at seven."

"Ah, but the little wretch, no doubt, was smart enough not to buy a ticket, and probably jumped on the car from the opposite side of the track just on purpose to escape observation."

But the station-agent was positive he would have noticed her no matter which side of the track she had been on, so the senator was reluctantly forced to the conclusion that she had been shrewd enough to go either up or down the road to the next station, and there had taken the cars.

"It is rather late, but I will do the best I can to head her off," Bumblebig muttered, as he proceeded to the telegraph office with the idea of telegraphing to the police in New York to be on the lookout for the runaway, and to arrest her the moment she was found, on the charge of theft. But, when he began to write the message, it suddenly occurred to him that he couldn't give a very accurate description of her dress.

So the senator was obliged to return to the mansion in order to examine the things in the girl's room so as to find out what she had worn away.

Bumblebig was a regular old woman in some particulars, and, unlike the most of mankind, was familiar with the details of a woman's wardrobe; therefore he knew exactly what Helen had worn when she fled.

"The little beast hasn't taken a thing but what belongs to her," he growled, in great dissatisfaction. "Never mind; I'll swear that I dropped ten dollars in the room here, and when I came back after it, I found that she had gone, and so I knew she had found the money and fled with it. That will do; if I cannot have the secretary, I will get square with her, anyway."

An hour afterward all the police in New York were on the watch for an absconding girl, named Helen Home, accused of having robbed Senator Bumblebig of Tarrytown.

"She can't escape me very long," was the comment of the old scoundrel after this precious piece of work was performed, and he was on the road to his mansion, hungry for his breakfast, for so absorbed had he been in the pursuit that he had not stopped to take a morsel to eat since he had got out of bed.

But when he got to the table he could not enjoy the food, being so full of rage and chagrin.

"Oh, I'll be even with the jade if it costs me a thousand dollars!" he fumed.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A STORMY INTERVIEW.

THE senator got up from the table with the feeling of a man who had breakfasted upon sawdust and dish-water, and hardly had he comfortably seated for a perusal of the morning journals when word was brought that some gentlemen desired to speak with him.

With a very ill grace indeed the senator went to ascertain what his visitors wished.

He found three gentlemen in the hall—the same three who had started that morning from the private detective's office on Broadway to hunt up the girl.

There was Garrowcroft, the Englishman, Muttledud, the detective, and old Canary—for the old scamp had been forced to come along, as the Briton had declared he would not pay him a cent until he ascertained that the information which he had given was correct.

Canary had remonstrated, but the Englishman was like a rock, and the old confidence-man was obliged to yield.

Garrowcroft acted as spokesman: his anxiety to find the girl was so intense that even his stoical calmness had disappeared and he was never more excited.

"Senator Bumblebig?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"I have come in reference to a young lady who is now beneath your roof, I believe."

The senator opened his eyes.

"Miss Helen Home is the name she bears, I understand."

Bumblebig did not understand this at all, and rather resented the idea of anybody troubling themselves about his affairs.

"No such person here," he responded, shortly.

"I beg your pardon, but are you not mistaken?" asked Garrowcroft, politely, yet with the air of a man indisposed to stand any nonsense.

Bumblebig exploded; he was just in a good condition to get in a row with somebody.

"Great Caesar!" he exclaimed; "am I in my own house, or am I not? Get out of here, or I will have my servants kick you out."

Canary commenced to edge toward the door, but the other two stood firm.

"No, you won't!" cried the Englishman.

"No, you won't, boss fly!" echoed the detective, never more in his glory than when he had a chance to bully some one. "I want you to understand that we came here on business, and we don't want any guff!"

"Do you know who I am?" roared the senator, red in the face with rage at the idea of being defied in his own house.

"Sir, it does not make a farthing's difference to me who you are!" retorted Garrowcroft. "I have come here on business, and I do not propose to go away without transacting it. You brought the girl, Helen Home, from New York, about two weeks ago. I have ascertained in the village that she was in this house yesterday, and I do not intend going away without seeing her."

"No, we don't! Put that in your pipe and smoke it!" added the detective.

Canary, all this while, prudently getting nearer and nearer the door, for the servants had commenced to gather in the hall, and the prospects for a row seemed excellent.

"The girl was here—a beggar that I picked out of the gutter, and she repaid my kindness by stealing everything that she could lay her hands on, and last night giving leg-bail."

"What! That poor child steal—you infamous old scoundrel!" exclaimed Garrowcroft, white with passion.

Bumblebig got as red in the face as a boiled lobster.

"You villain! Do you dare to come here and insult me in my own house?"

And the senator, fairly crazy with rage, made a blow at the other's face, but the Briton, like the majority of his race, was an expert in the art of self-defense, so, in the easiest manner possible, he parried the clumsily-aimed blow, and, with a single well-directed stroke, laid the senator flat upon his back.

Bumblebig struck with a howl of rage and a concussion that seemed to fairly shake the floor; but he was on his feet again with remarkable agility, and like a mad bull again he rushed at the intruder, only to again receive a whack which keeled him over a second time.

The senator had got enough; the second stroke, which had materially spoiled the appearance of his countenance, had taken all the fight out of him.

He yelled to the servants to come and pick him up, and to put the strangers out. The first command they obeyed readily enough, but paid no attention to the second, exerting all their energies in conducting their bruised and battered master to his apartment, he groaning and swearing in the most frightful manner. After the exhibition which they had witnessed of the stranger's prowess, not one of them had any wish to test it further.

Seeing that the strangers were not disposed to retire, the housekeeper—who like the rest had been attracted by the noise of the altercation—took it upon herself to explain:

"Indeed, gentlemen, Miss Home is not here now," she said. "She went away last night secretly and without saying a word to any one, and Mr. Bumblebig was very much annoyed this morning when he discovered that she was gone. He has taken the idea into his head that she acted dishonestly, but I have been up and examined her room, and I have not been able to discover that she has taken a single article which did not belong to her. The senator is very unreasonable when he gets a notion into his head, and he insists that she has stolen something, which is the reason why she ran away without saying anything. So impressed is he with this absurd suspicion that he has taken the trouble to telegraph to the police in New York, and instructed them to arrest the young lady if she can be found."

"The infamous old scoundrel!" exclaimed the Englishman, in high indignation. "If he had not thought that the poor child was alone and friendless, he would never have dared to subject her to such an insult!"

"Indeed, sir, she seemed to be a nice, modest girl, and did not look like a person who would do anything wrong," and the housekeeper cast a peculiar, sideways glance at the stranger, just as if she meditated saying some more, but was in doubt in regard to the wisdom of so doing.

"She would not, I am sure, and from what I have seen of this miserable old wretch, I feel certain she had good reasons for quitting his service."

"It is possible, sir, but of course, under the circumstances, I ought not to say anything about that."

"And the unfortunate child fled without leaving any clue behind by means of which she could be traced?"

"Mr. Bumblebig was not able to discover any."

"This is the strangest chapter of accidents; whenever I get upon the track of this poor child, something is sure to happen to throw me off. Well, we must return to New York and see if we can find any clue there."

Taking their cue, Canary and the detective walked out of the house; the Englishman fol-

lowed, but paused just outside the door, the housekeeper being right behind him.

"Madam, I take it that you are a friend to this unfortunate child, who seems to be the prey of ill-luck," he said, speaking cautiously, so as not to be overheard.

"Indeed, sir, I wish her nothing but good."

"If any information of her is gained, will you communicate with me? Here is my name, and my address is Brevoort House, New York."

The housekeeper read the name inscribed upon the card aloud, then looked at the Englishman in a thoughtful way.

"What is the matter—do you mistrust me?"

"No, sir," she answered; "you look like a gentleman, and like a man who would not be apt to harm a friendless, homeless girl."

"Upon my word, madam, I assure you it will be the luckiest moment in Helen's life when she meets me."

"You seek her for good, then—only for good?"

"Entirely for good, I pledge you that upon the honor of an English gentleman."

Mrs. Sparrow turned the card over and wrote a line hurriedly upon the back.

"There!" she said, giving him the card; "go to that address and perhaps you may gain some information, but do not disclose to any one, not even to your companions, my agency in this matter."

"Certainly not," replied Garrowcroft, promptly, and putting the card carefully away.

"Good-by, sir, and may Heaven deal with you as you deal with her."

The strangers departed, and Mrs. Sparrow closed the door after them, feeling thankful that she had been able to put the Englishman upon the right track.

On the way to the depot, Canary and the detective got into a violent argument. Muttelbud insisted that so long as the girl had not been found, the old man was not entitled to any reward, while Canary declared that it wasn't his fault if the girl had skipped in the night.

The Englishman settled the dispute, though, by paying the money and offering a hundred more for the discovery of the fugitive.

When the city was reached, Garrowcroft separated from his companions, jumped into a cab and was driven to the address in Jersey City which Mrs. Sparrow had inscribed upon the card, but to his utter astonishment, for he had absolute faith that he would receive information, the people at the house knew nothing whatever of any such person as Helen Home, although well acquainted with Senator Bumblebig's housekeeper.

The Englishman was utterly astonished, and knew not what to make of it.

"She meant it all right, I am sure," he muttered, as he was being driven back to New York again. "Well, the only thing to be done is to contrive a secret interview with her so she can explain."

CHAPTER XXX.

A LOVER'S QUEST.

QUITE a number of chapters have we transcribed since the one where the details of the meeting between the lovers on the beach at Long Branch were given.

The forlorn country girl has figured prominently in our tale since then, but the man's name has not been mentioned, yet we judge few careful readers have failed to guess that Roland Reade and Denby Livingstone were one and the same.

In his masquerading guise of a poor adventurer, with all the world before him to make a fortune in, he had won the love of the country girl, although at the time he fancied that some months must elapse before he would be in a condition to claim her as his own publicly.

The strange events though which followed his return to the city, the death of his mother, and his being put in possession of the fortune which she had inherited from Gloster Plantagenet seemed to smooth the path between him and his love and caused the obstacles which intervened to melt into thin air.

As soon as he recovered from the shock occasioned by the dreadful tragedy, he wrote a carefully-guarded letter to Helen, addressing it to the village and signing it Roland Reade. In the letter he told her to be of good heart, to keep up her courage, for the future looked brighter, and he had no doubt that all would be well.

He did not affix any address to it as he judged it wisest that the girl should not answer the note.

Then when affairs were all settled, and everything seemed to be going smoothly, he was unable to control the fever of impatience which had seized upon him to look again on the sweet face of the beautiful girl who had won his heart, and he wrote again.

This time he told her that he thought he would be able to arrange matters so that she could come to the city if she so desired, and that in a very few months now, he would be able to fulfill his promise and make her his bride.

This note he also signed Roland Reade, and

directed her to address it in care of the general post-office.

Ten days went by without his receiving an answer, and, just as he had about given up all idea of hearing from her, and was meditating a trip to Long Branch, to see what had become of her, he received a letter, post marked Long Branch.

The handwriting did not seem to be hers, though, and he opened the envelope with a presentiment that he was about to hear bad news.

The letter was from old Waybit, and briefly said that he had received both letters written to Helen, and that he understood the trick of writing letters to her expecting that they would fall into his hands and so lead him to think that the writer had nothing to do with her flight. But he knew better, and unless Helen was instantly sent back to him he would apply to the law to restore his ward and to punish her abductor.

Denby perused the letter with a grave face, and, for a moment, was almost dazed by the blow.

Helen was gone; she had fled from her home and yet had not come to him as he had directed her to do in any such emergency.

Another idea occurred to him: was it true? had she really fled, or was it only a cunning trick on the part of the old man to keep him from coming after the girl?

Waybit was quite capable of such a thing, and so the young lover determined to beard the lion in his den—the Jersey farmer amid his pines—and ascertain the truth.

A few hours later Denby was walking in through the gate of the farmer.

Old Waybit, who had been busy tending to his crops that morning, was cooling off in the shade of a large locust tree.

Not knowing the young man by sight, the old fellow only surveyed him with the natural curiosity that the majority of rural dwellers feel at the sight of a stranger.

"Mr. Waybit?"

"That's my name."

"I have a little business with you."

"Sart'in; sit down," and he kicked an old stool, which stood by the rude bench upon which he reclined, over to the visitor.

"I desire a little information."

"Well, I s'pose I can give it if there's no objection."

"It is in regard to a certain young lady—"

The old man sat bolt upright.

"Helen, who now lives with you."

"Oh, I know you now!" cried Waybit, in a sudden outburst of rage. "I suspicioned you when I saw you coming up the road. You're arter Helen, are you, and you are the Mister Roland Reade who has been writing letters from York to her?"

"You are quite right, sir; Helen knew me under that name."

"And what have you done with her? How dare you come here and take my gal away? Don't you know I kin take the law on you, and I will, too, unless you bring back the gal!"

"And Helen is not here, then?" Denby questioned, eying the old man sharply, so as to be certain whether he was speaking truth or not.

"You know she ain't here! and you can't fool me with pretending not to know anything about her. You just bring the gal back, or I'll go to law about it. Ain't you ashamed of yourself, a nice young gentleman, for to come and coax a poor man's gal to run off with you? You have taken away my support, and how am I going to get my living now?"

"You didn't expect that the girl would stay in this desolate place and work all her life for you?" demanded Denby, in indignation.

"I didn't want her to work," retorted the old man. "She worked of her own accord, 'cos she liked to work, and would rather work than be idle. But it wasn't for her work that I wanted her. I used to get a regular sum of money each month for taking care of her, and when she ran away, somehow, the lawyers in New York heard of it, and they stopped the payments dead short."

Denby was amazed at this information, and felt convinced that if the old man would speak he could get a clew which would enable him to unravel the mystery enshrouding the birth and early childhood of his betrothed, although it seemed probable from what Daddy Waybit said that he knew very little about the matter.

"I don't exactly understand you," Denby remarked. "Do you mean to say that you received a regular amount monthly for taking care of Helen, and that when she left home the payments stopped?"

"That is what I said and no lie about it, either. Ever so many years ago, when she was only a baby, these lawyers that I spoke of made an arrangement for me to take care of Helen and bring her up as my own child. This here farm was deeded over to me, and I received twenty-five dollars a month cash, and now the blamed thing has all bust, and I've got to work for my living, worse luck."

"And you never knew anything about the person or persons who placed the child with you?"

"No! What did I care for them, so long as I

got the money all right. I only knew the lawyers, that's all, and it was one of the conditions of the thing, too, that I shouldn't try for to find out anything about the child—whose she was, you know, and what did I care as long as I got the money?"

"And now payment is refused because she is gone?"

"Of course that is the reason! What other reason can there be?"

"But do the lawyers say that is the reason?"

"No, they don't; did you ever catch a lawyer to own up to anything or to tell the truth in his life? Nobody ever did!"

"But what do the lawyers say, then?"

"Oh, they lie, as they always do," the old man snarled. "The money has always come to hand regularly, on the first of every month, but when the first of the month came this time the gal had been gone about a week; of course I didn't think that would make any difference, but it did, for the money didn't come. I waited four or five days, and then I wrote up to York 'bout it, and the answer came right back that there wasn't any money for me, so I went up to the city myself to see about it. The lawyers were polite enough, but they didn't give me a bit of satisfaction. They said that the year had ended and they had paid me all the money that had been placed in their hands. The way they explained the matter was that the money for the year was placed in their hands in a lump, at the beginning of it, and then they paid it out to me in monthly parts. The money was gone; no more had been paid in, and they supposed that the party did not intend to pay any longer. Of course I said that there might be some mistake about the matter and that they had better see the party, and tell 'im the money was gone. But no; they said they reckoned the thing was all over, and that I had better be content with what I had got. Then I asked if I couldn't see the party, but they said they couldn't give me any information as they did not know the address now—a blamed lie, of course. To kinder smooth the matter over, I said that if I had known that the party wouldn't like it, I wouldn't have let the gal go off on a visit, but, anyway, I would fetch her right home. I thought that would fix things, you know, but they didn't seem to pay any attention. The old fellow said that it didn't make any difference where the gal was, whether she was away or with me; the money had stopped and that was the end of it; but they didn't fool me for a cent. I knew they had found out that the girl had run away, and that was why they had stopped the money."

It was plain to Denby now that the mystery surrounding his beloved was even deeper than he had anticipated.

"Suppose I go and see the lawyers—"

"Oh, yes; you want to catch some of the money!" cried the old man, angrily. "Just you bring the girl back, that's all!"

It took a long time for the young man to convince the old scamp that he really knew nothing of Helen's present whereabouts, but had come in search of her; but at last old Waybit acknowledged that he might be mistaken, and then Denby astonished him by saying he would give him five hundred dollars if he could find Helen—a proposition which the other accepted greedily enough.

A heavy heart Denby bore back with him to the city; and now there was another man eager to find Helen Home.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A PECULIAR CHARACTER.

RICHARD PLANTAGENET had not let the grass grow under his feet after Livingstone had derided his offer for compromise, for it was then plain he could only gain the ends he sought by open, actual war.

He had retained, as his counsel, one of the most noted of the tribe to be found in New York—a noted limb of the law, by name Colonel Baldwin Albany—more generally known as Colonel Baldy, because of his bald pate.

The colonel was a tall, rather lean man, short-sighted, and disreputable-looking, having one of the most fiery red noses ever seen upon a mortal.

His line of practice was peculiar; he seldom appeared in a court-room, or argued a case, for he was not a fluent speaker; his appearance was very much against him, and the odds were about ten to one that he would be under the influence of liquor when most needed. He confined himself almost entirely to furnishing advice, and of his clients nine-tenths of them were lawyers, and some of them men who ranked as leaders at the New York bar. But, able men as they were, in subtle legal questions, they were content to draw inspiration from drunken, disreputable Colonel Baldy. No better counsel, no clearer exponent of the law was there in the city than this same old, and, apparently, worthless drunkard.

And to Colonel Baldy Richard Plantagenet went for advice.

Richard brought the will with him, spread it out for the colonel's inspection, and detailed all the particulars in regard to it.

As it happened, Baldy was sober and in the best possible condition for business.

He chuckled over the story of the finding of the will.

"Beautiful, me b'ye, beautiful!" he remarked. The colonel was an Irishman by birth, and his speech was enriched with a slight and melodious brogue. "I couldn't have arranged the thing better meself. Found in a book, promiscuous-like, in the parlor, before all of yees! Beautiful, upon me conscience."

"Take a look and see if it is all right. I had it examined by D., of Philadelphia, and he said there couldn't be any question in regard to it."

"He knows the law, but you see you don't, and that is where you led him into a ditch. On the face of it, as an instrument, it is all right; any Jack could tell that; but it's the circumstances connected with it that we must look into. Suppose I show Mr. D. a check for ten thousand dollars, signed by Astor or Vanderbilt. Wouldn't he, on the face of it, say it was good? The signature is there, and either man is good for the amount, but when it comes to proving that the man actually did sign the check, begorra! if he didn't, wouldn't we slip up?"

"Oh, but there isn't any doubt about Mrs. Plantagenet's signature! There it is; plenty of persons can be found to testify that it is her signature, and the two witnesses can swear that they saw her write it."

"That is good enough. 'Jerry Bitters and Larry Marble.' Faix! me b'ye, them names are not illigant ones to tackle a jury with."

"Bitters was the coachman and Marble a waiter in the house. They happened to be near at hand, and were called into the room to witness the signature of the old lady."

"An' they will swear to that?"

"They will."

"Did they come high?" whispered the lawyer, with a droll smile.

Richard's face darkened.

"Oh, don't mind my joke, me b'ye! Life is all a joke, and I take my whack at it as I go along," the colonel explained. "But, I say; this name, Bitters, is familiar to me. Maybe it is beka'se it reminds me of something to drink."

"He is the man you procured bail for the other day—the House of Detention, don't you remember?"

"Oh, yes; he's the man that made the charge ag'in' young Livingstone about murdering his mother, and he's one of the fellers to swear to the will!"

"You don't like that."

"I don't like this paper at all! Faith! I'd tear it all to pieces if I got hould of it in a court-room. Me jewell see how weak it is! how improbable that a lady like Mrs. Plantagenet should will away four or five million dollars in her bedroom without any lawyer to draw the paper up, and a couple of the lowest servants in the house as witnesses!"

"I drew it out at her request. I was familiar enough with the usual forms."

"And you are one of the principal legatees! Oh, me b'ye, you ought to have known better than that, d'ye see! Don't you apprehend how suspicious the whole matter is? No wonder Denby Livingstone laughs at ye, and defies ye to make a stand on this will."

"And is it not good enough to risk a contest?"

"If you want to get beat afore ye begin, it might do," he replied, with true Irish humor. "Don't ye see that there is a suspicious look about the thing? Throw aside all your interest in the matter and examine it just as if ye knew nothing at all about it. Wouldn't ye be apt to say, at the first glance, there's something wrong about this paper? The book business was very cute, but for a woman to do such a thing was mighty improbable. Why did she put it in a book? Why wasn't it in the safe, among the rest of her papers?"—and then a sudden idea occurred to the lawyer, for he knew all the particulars regarding Mrs. Plantagenet's death, having posted himself when called upon to interfere in the case of the witness detained in the House of Detention. In his sharp, shrewd way he looked Richard straight in the eye for a moment, and the other, understanding in an instant what was passing in the mind of the lawyer, scowled darkly.

"Well, well, it's a bad business," he murmured, apparently talking more to himself than to his client, "and I don't think it is wise to go into it; it's like a man taking hould of a rat by the tail; there's no telling how the affair will end; the man may get more than he bargained for. And then these two witnesses—no doubt they are all cocked and primed and know exactly what they are to swear to."

"Oh, yes, I have seen to that."

"And they will stand cross-examination?"

"I think so."

"And they won't let out that you coached them in regard to what they were to swear?"

"Oh, no; I warned them particularly on that point."

"They must be foine witnesses if they are all fixed beforehand for a cross-examination. And now tell me, me jewell! this will was signed by Mrs. Plantagenet in her own bed-chamber at a

certain time, and these two men saw her sign, and are prepared to swear to it?"

"Yes."

"And you have got the time, so that one man won't say it was four o'clock in the afternoon, and t'other chap swear it was nine at night?"

"Oh, I looked out for that; it was just about five, for the clock on the mantel-piece struck the hour while they were in the room."

"That's a foine idea—the clock is really beautiful. But here's another pint: supposing there was some mistake about this matter, do you know where these two men were at five o'clock on the day in question?"

Richard understood exactly what the lawyer was driving at—the point was one which had not occurred to him, carefully as he had planned all the details of the scheme. He thought the matter over for a moment, and then shook his head.

"Ye don't know?"

"No."

"Suppose these two men swear that the will was signed in their presence in the Fifth avenue house, on a certain day, at five in the afternoon, and some witnesses—who have nothing to do with the case, and are not interested in it at all, swear that at five o'clock on that very day one man was drinking beer up in Third avenue and t'other playing billiards downtown?"

"But such a thing is very unlikely!"

"Is it? Begorra! if you had been tripped up in that way in your life as many times as I have, you wouldn't say so. Don't ye know that it is the unlikely things that are always happening?"

"Then it is of no use to think of fighting this will through?" Richard observed, with a gloomy face.

"No use! Ye don't stand the ghost of a chance."

"Look at that!" and Plantagenet tossed another legal-looking document across the table.

"The will of Gloster Plantagenet—everything willed to 'my only daughter'; executed ten years ago, and witnessed by John Matthews and James Graham—"

"Then clerks in Plantagenet's office—"

"And now brokers on their own account in Wall street. I know both of them. They are the right kind of men for witnesses. I'll go all I'm worth on this paper. That isn't saying much, though, unless ye lump in what I owe along with what I have. I'd be willing to do it, an' call it square."

"This will was executed just after the birth of his female child; that child died; now is not the mother, this same Mrs. Plantagenet, whose will the other paper is supposed to be, the heir of that child?"

"Hould on a bit. No doubt he intended to leave his property to that infant daughter, but he doesn't say so; he doesn't mention her by name. He only says 'to my oldest daughter.' How do you know that he hadn't a daughter, or a couple of dozens of them for that matter, across the water? Some of these foreigners are the devil for leaving their families behind when they emigrate and getting new ones on this side of the water. Of course it is pretty certain that he meant the infant who afterward died, but he doesn't say so, and his oldest daughter, if she exists, born in lawful wedlock, can take the property in spite of everybody, and it don't matter the scratch of a pin where she comes from, or who was her mother."

Richard was silent for a moment, as if in thought.

"I am on her track, and since I can't make terms with Denby I will with her," he at length remarked.

"Then he had been married before and had a daughter by that marriage?"

"Yes," Richard admitted.

"Then," assured the counsel, "if you can find her you'll win beyond a doubt."

"Oh, I've got her safe enough, I think," and with this assurance he departed.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A DISCOVERY.

THE moment Denby arrived in the city, after his unsatisfactory visit to the old farm in the pines, he hurried to the office of Ned Purchase, the lawyer, and laid the whole matter before him. He thought that the lawyer, with his great experience in regard to the undercurrents of New York life, would be able to afford him some assistance in his endeavor to trace the girl, for that Helen had come directly to the city he felt sure.

"Certainly! Delighted to do anything I can for you," the lawyer observed, after the young man had explained the object of his visit. "Helen Waybit," he murmured, as he jotted the name down in his note-book; "it seems to me that that name is familiar; I've heard it before, and only recently, too. Let me see! I'll be hanged if it wasn't in one of the *Herald's* personals, only a week or so ago, too!"

"I did not see it, but then I seldom read the advertisements."

"Jump in a car with me and we will ride down to the office. It was only a week or two

ago, and we can easily find it by looking over a file of back papers."

As the lawyer had said, it was not a difficult matter to gain the information.

"And who is this Mr. Muttelbud who desires to find out about the girl?" Denby asked.

"He's a private detective who has an office up-town. I am well-acquainted with him, and I have no doubt that I can easily find out what he wants of her, and if he has found out anything about her."

"It may be a device of the old man, Way-bit, to get on her track," Denby suggested. He had explained all the particulars fully to the lawyer.

"I think not; for how would he know that she had called herself Helen Home after coming to the city? But it is idle to waste time in speculation when in half an hour we can find out all about it."

Away then went the pair to Muttelbud's office.

The detective was in and ready to oblige Mr. Purchase to the extent of his power, but not the least bit of information could he furnish, excepting that he was employed by Mr. Garrowcroft, who was an Englishman, and who had only been a little while in this country, to hunt up the lost girl; but as to what he wanted with her, after he found her, was a mystery too deep for him to solve, although he had been exerting his gigantic intellect upon the subject ever since he had been employed in the search.

"He's a deep old cuss, I tell you, gentlemen!" the detective declared, in that impressive style which was his chief stock in trade. "You can't pump him any more than you can pump good old Bourbon whisky out of a coal-mine. I've tried it, and slipped up on it, and when I slip up, what chance is there for any other mortal man? Ned can tell you that. But one thing, gentlemen, I can tell you: he has been spending money like water for to find this gal, whatever he wants of her; but as to why he does that, I have given it up as a conundrum long ago."

"You have absolutely no trace then?" observed Denby, rather discouraged.

"Well, I have got hold of the tail of an idea, but whether it will amount to anything or not is a question," and the detective assumed a wise look. "Here's a letter that I've run across and I may be able to work something out of it, there's no telling," and Muttelbud got out his pocket-book to show the letter.

"It's from a feller to the gal, making an appointment, and it may be just possible that she has managed to find him and he has stowed her away somewhere."

Then he fished out the letter.

"It is signed Roland Reade."

"That is my letter!" Denby exclaimed. "That is the name under which she knew me. When I made her acquaintance I had good reason for not wishing that she should know my true name."

"I see; it is the old idea—the prince in disguise," Purchase remarked. The lawyer was inclined to be somewhat given to romance at times. "You didn't want her to know that you were Denby Livingstone, the heir to four or five millions, but you wanted to be loved for yourself alone."

"That was my idea precisely," the other admitted.

The detective pricked up his ears at the mention of Livingstone's wealth. Here was a man to whom it was worth his while to be obliging, so with the opening remark that he presumed Mr. Livingstone would like to know all he could in regard to the girl, he related all he knew about the affair.

Of course with the knowledge that had been obtained from old Canary, it was comparatively easy to trace the career of the girl from the time she left her home in Jersey up to the period when she fled from the house of Senator Bumblebig. And the blood of the young man fairly boiled in his veins when he learned of the infamous accusation which the enraged old rogue had made against her, and when he said as much, Muttelbud, with great delight, related how handsomely the Englishman had polished off the senator.

"I will take an early opportunity to call upon him and thank him for having thrashed the old scoundrel and brute."

"He's a bad egg," remarked the lawyer. "He has been mixed up in three or four women scrapes to my knowledge, but by the liberal use of money and calling upon his stanch political friends for aid, he easily overcame all prosecution where a meaner man in such a situation most certainly would have gone to Sing Sing."

"Yes, he's a bad 'un," chimed in the detective, "and, by the by, if you call upon Mr. Garrowcroft perhaps he will be willing to tell you why he is so anxious to find the girl, when he knows why you are so deeply interested in her."

"Suppose we go for him at once," suggested the lawyer. "There isn't anything like striking when the iron is hot."

"You'll find him at the Brevoort House."

Thanking the detective for his kindness, the

two withdrew and immediately proceeded to seek the Englishman.

That gentleman was at home, and although at first he was somewhat disposed—after the fashion of his countrymen—to be uncommunicative, yet, after Denby had introduced himself, and with the generous frankness of youth, explained fully how it was he came to take an interest in Helen, the Briton's reserve vanished.

"I cannot just at present imitate your candor and explain to you why it is that I am so anxious to find the poor child, but I will say that you may rest assured I intend her no harm, but, on the contrary, much good, and I am determined that she shall be discovered, no matter how much it costs."

More than this the gentleman was reluctant to say; and so, after a brief but pleasant interview, the twain withdrew.

"Suppose we go and see the superintendent of police?" the lawyer now proposed. "He is posted about all matters of this kind, and he might be able to give us an idea."

Livingstone thought the suggestion a good one, and so away they went to interview the chief.

The superintendent was in his office and listened attentively while Purchase told the story of the missing girl.

"Helen Home?" he said; "why, I had my attention called to her case yesterday morning, and it cropped up again to-day. Senator Bumblebig, who has a place up on the Hudson, was after her with a sharp stick; he charged her with levitating with some of his valuables, and telegraphed a full description of the girl, how she was dressed, etc., and requested me to catch her if I could. I notified all of our men, and from one of the upper precincts, not an hour ago, I got word that on the river's bank, near the railroad, a lot of women's clothes had been found, outwar' garments, hat, etc., answering exactly to the description given of those worn by the girl. The supposition is, of course, that she has committed suicide."

For a moment the young lover sat like a man stunned at this unexpected and heavy blow; then he roused himself with an effort and declared that he could not believe such a thing possible.

"Of course it is all mere supposition; it may not be her garments at all. Suppose you go up there and see for yourself?"

The advice was good, and the pair acted upon it immediately.

An hour later they were at the up-town station-house; the superintendent had given them a note of introduction to the officer in charge of the station, so they were received with all honor.

The garments were produced and Denby, with a shudder, recognized them immediately. They were the same that had been worn by the girl when he parted with her on the beach at Long Branch!

Still, Livingstone could not bring himself to believe she had committed suicide.

The officer who had found the clothes happened to come in, just then, and, at the suggestion of the captain, he conducted Denby and the lawyer to the place where he had found the garments.

It was a secluded spot, and just such a one as a desperate mortal, tired of life, would have selected to take the plunge into eternity.

But neither Livingstone nor the lawyer believed in the suicide theory.

"She is alive, depend upon it!" Purchase declared; "and this clothes business is a cunning trick, worked either by her or somebody else, to throw pursuit off the track."

"I will not rest until I find her!" Denby cried, with all the fervor of a young and anxious lover.

And now then, what was the truth in regard to this matter—what had become of the girl?

Once again we will follow on her flying footsteps as she hurried along the dark and lonesome country road toward the railroad station, never dreaming that hard upon her track followed three fellows, whose unprepossessing appearance would have made even a stout-hearted man apt to give them a wide berth, if encountered in a lonely part of the road.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

STRANGE QUARTERS.

ALONG the road hurried the girl, eager to catch the train. She had no fear of being overtaken, since her escape would not be discovered until morning. Therefore she paid but little attention to her surroundings, so the ill-looking men, stealthily creeping after her, were able to approach quite near before she discovered their presence.

"That's the girl," the tallest and stoutest of the men had remarked.

"She has come a long distance," added one of the others, "but she trots along lively."

"It's wonderful the strength some of these gals have," the third man observed.

"The wagon is at the cross road, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's at the next road."

"We had better go for her just as soon as we get to the road. Have your blanket all ready

to throw over her head, Bill; and you, Jack, pick her right up in your arms and put her in the wagon, and I will clap the sponge to her nose, so as to keep her from making an outcry. Let me know when we get near the road, if either of you can, for I'll be hanged if I can make out anything in this darkness."

Then in silence they stole along, seeming, with their noiseless steps, like so many spectral forms.

They had got quite near the fugitive, when one of them gave the warning that the cross-road was near.

"Stand ready when I speak to her and she turns, to throw the blanket over her head," the leader commanded.

And just as the girl reached the cross-road, she hesitated, as if to make sure that she was going right before she proceeded.

The foremost masked man improved the opportunity.

"Is that you, Miss Cadwalader?" he exclaimed.

Helen turned, surprised, and a little alarmed that any one had approached so near without her knowledge, yet somewhat reassured by the man's speaking as if he believed her an acquaintance; but even before she could reply a dark figure darted forward and threw a blanket over her head, and despite her struggles and muffled screams she was lifted by strong arms and carried to the covered wagon standing near.

When she was placed in the vehicle, with a dexterous hand the leader produced a chloroformed sponge, which was quickly applied to the nostrils of the still struggling girl.

Despite her moans and desperate attempts to free herself, little by little her senses reeled, until at last nature was conquered and the girl lay senseless, at the mercy of the attackers.

"It's all right, governor; she has give in," observed the man holding the girl in his arms.

"Prop her up on the back seat between you two, and give her fresh air. We don't want her to smother now, after all our trouble," the leader commanded. "But if she shows signs of reviving so as to make an outcry, let me know; but I don't think she will, for I gave her an awful dose."

Away the wagon went to the southward at rapid speed.

When Helen recovered consciousness she found herself upon a small, low bed in a little room, plainly furnished. It was a peculiar-shaped apartment, being long and narrow, with a window at one end and a door at the other.

Through the window the moonlight shone so that she could easily distinguish her surroundings.

The only pieces of furniture in the room were two beds, upon one of which the girl reclined. The other stood by the opposite wall of the apartment. The heads of both beds were toward the window, and after a few wondering glances around—for Helen was dull and dazed at first—she fancied she could distinguish the outlines of a human form beneath the clothes of the other couch.

Then her gaze rested upon the window through which the moonbeams shone, and, to her surprise, she discovered that the casement was guarded on the outside by stout iron bars.

In the door, too, was a little window, in the upper part, so that any one in the entry could look into the room.

Was it a prison, then?

Then the girl looked at herself. She was lying on the outside of the bed; her outward garments had been removed, and she was now robed in a beautiful blue silk dress, exquisitely made and trimmed. Upon her wrists were costly bracelets, and half a dozen jeweled rings ornamented her fingers.

Helen was so surprised at this metamorphosis that, involuntarily, she rubbed her eyes to be sure that she was awake.

The survey of the room and her person finished, the eyes of the girl again turned to the occupant of the other bed. That some one was sleeping there she was sure.

Unable at last to restrain her curiosity and surprise she arose, determined to see if her thoughts were right or wrong; but she put her feet to the floor only to discover that she was so weak and dizzy that she could hardly keep her feet; the walls of the apartment seemed to fairly spin around her, and it was fully ten minutes before she was able to stand without support.

At last, though, the dizziness passed away sufficiently to enable her with slow and uncertain steps, to cross the narrow floor, to find that her surmise was correct; the bed was occupied by a sleeper—a young and rather pretty woman, although, even in her slumbers, there was a strange, wan expression upon her features.

Was this woman, like herself, a prisoner, or was she a guard and spy? And what was the meaning of all this strange affair? The sleeping woman certainly did not look like one placed there upon guard, but more like a sick and feeble girl, who needed care and attention.

"Possibly I can find some one without who will explain the meaning of all this," the girl murmured as she advanced to the door, but

when she tried to open it found that it was locked.

Through the little window she could look into the entry without. It was quite a long passage, and a gaslight was burning at one end. It looked like a hotel entry, for it was nicely carpeted; some easy-chairs and a couple of small tables were placed along it, at intervals, and there were no less than eight doors opening into it, four on each side, and all of them with the little window in the upper part exactly like the one in the door of the room where she was confined, and at each end of the entry was a solid door, without the window.

"What does it mean?" questioned the girl, after she had thoroughly surveyed this passage and then returned and seated herself upon the edge of the bed. "Is it a prison?"

She pondered long and painfully over the strange situation—over her elegant garb—over the seizure and abduction—over her extraordinary adventures since her advent in the great city—pondered, but could not answer one of the questions which she asked herself.

Happening to glance down the front of her dress she discovered a gold chain attached by a hook to a button-hole while the other end went into a little pocket at the waist.

"It is a watch," she wondered, and then drew out the most elegant timepiece her eyes had ever beheld—a tiny thing, all blazing with diamonds! It was running, and the time was exactly four o'clock.

"A few hours more and I shall know what all this means."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE STRANGER'S STORY.

In a short time the chorus of the birds without began, and the girl, used to country life, understood that this outburst of melody heralded the coming of the morn.

Gradually the fumes of the potent drug which had clouded her brain cleared away, and by the time the first gray light of the morning came stealing in through the window, he began to feel something like her own self.

When the light became so strong that she could distinguish objects without, she went to the window and looked forth.

A rural view met her eyes, a large, park-like garden, hemmed in by a high stone wall, so lofty that no common man could have scaled it. Beyond this wall was a wood which barred the view.

The grounds were well-kept, and far more suited to a wealthy gentleman's country house than to a prison.

"Oh, this cannot be a jail, and yet, why are the windows barred? and wherefore the opening left in the door?"

Helen involuntarily turned to look again at the door, when she perceived the occupant of the other bed sitting up and looking at her.

She had a pleasant face, which would have been beautiful had it not been marred by a careworn and sad expression.

"Good-morning, dear! I'm so glad you have come!" she said, with a courteous nod, perceiving that the girl's eyes were fixed upon her. The voice was low, soft, and singularly sweet.

"Good-morning!" Helen replied, mechanically, for she was so amazed at this familiar greeting that she hardly knew what to say.

"I waited up for you ever so long, last night, because they said you were expected every moment, and I did not undress at all," and throwing aside the clothes, she showed she was in full house costume, "but madam persuaded me to lie down and rest a little when it got late, and I presume I was so tired I fell asleep almost immediately, for I do not remember anything at all after lying down. I suppose when you came in you found me asleep and put the clothes over me for fear I should take cold. That was real kind of you, and I know I shall love you ever so much, and you will love me a little, too won't you dear? for I'm real good-natured, if I do say it who ought not to. I know I am a little peevish at times, but you won't mind that, will you? because I am a great deal older than you are, and age has its privileges, you know."

"Indeed, madam, I did not know you were in the room until I awoke," Helen replied.

"A—didn't the professor say anything to you about me?"

"No, madam."

"Nor Madam Mary either?"

"I do not know either of the persons to whom you refer."

"Why, that is certainly very strange. I do not understand it," the other remarked, evidently perplexed.

"I beg your pardon, madam, but did you expect to see me?" Helen asked, perceiving that there was some mistake about the matter, and hoping by means of this to find out where she was and why she had been brought thither.

"Of course I did."

"But I am a stranger to you."

"Oh, yes; why, I don't even know your name."

"How is it, then, that you were expecting to see me?"

"Why, both the professor and Madam Mary told me about you. I have been lonesome for

quite a time, and have begged that a congenial companion might be procured for me, and the professor promised to comply with my wishes. He did not set any particular time for your arrival, but in some way I got the idea into my head that you were coming last night. I suppose the professor's manner toward me gave rise to the suspicion. I questioned Madam Mary about it, and she admitted that the young lady who had been selected for my companion would probably arrive last night, and as I informed you, my dear, I sat up until quite late, waiting for you to come. Madam Mary spoke in the highest terms of you, and said that she was sure I would be highly delighted with you after I became acquainted."

Helen pressed her hands to her forehead for a moment, and stared at the other in such a manner that the lady looked amazed.

Was it possible, the girl asked herself, that she had been kidnapped, and brought to this place simply to serve as a companion? Surely a young lady as a companion was never before secured in such a manner!

"Why do you look at me so strangely, my dear?" the other asked. "Are you ill?"

"Oh, madam, do you know the way in which I have been treated?" exclaimed Helen, becoming so excited and unnerved when she thought of her night's adventure that she could hardly refrain from bursting into tears.

"Dear me! no, of course not. I hope that they were not rude to you. I am sure I don't understand how any one could have the heart to be rude to you, for you look so gentle and so lovable. Won't you come and kiss me, dear?" and with a beseeching look she extended her thin white hands imploringly toward the girl.

Helen felt herself irresistibly drawn to the speaker; something in her face and voice appealed strangely to the sympathies of the forlorn and hunted girl, although she was not one to become intimate on slight acquaintance.

But she could not resist the impulse to comply with the lady's request.

"Kneel down, my child, and let me take a good look at you," the other said, as the girl came near.

Helen knelt down by the side of the bed; the lady passed her thin arms around her neck, took a long, wistful gaze at her face, and then, pressing her to her bosom, imprinted a long, affectionate kiss upon her ripe, red lips.

And as Helen was held in the fervent embrace she became conscious of a powerful, sickening sort of perfume with which the person of the lady seemed to be impregnated; the strangest, oddest scent that she had ever encountered, evidently not from a toilet article, but the odor from some powerful medicine with which the system of the lady had been saturated.

"I know I shall love you dear," said the lady, releasing Helen from her arms and making her sit by her side on the edge of the bed.

"But, madam, I do not understand this at all," the girl remarked, anxious for an explanation. "I had no idea at all of coming here, until I was here. I do not even know where I am. I was assaulted last night while walking along a country road. A man came up behind and spoke to me—called me by some name. I turned to tell him he had made a mistake—that I was not the person he imagined me to be, when a blanket was thrown over my head; I was forced into a carriage; then some powerful drug applied to my nostrils until I was thrown into a stupor, and I knew nothing more until I awoke and found myself here. Oh, madam, what is this place—what is the meaning of the barred window—of this strange room, so bare of furniture, and that odd hole in the door, so any one without can look into the room at all times? Is it a prison?"

"My dear child, you are feverish," replied the lady, soothingly, smoothing Helen's glossy hair as she spoke. "All this that you speak of is nothing but a horrid dream. Madam Mary told me that you had been very ill of a fever, and that was why you had not become before. I suppose they took you before you were fairly well, and that is why all this delusion seems so real to you."

Helen gazed at the speaker with amazed eyes. Could it be possible that it was the truth, and that all the horrid happenings which had racked her soul had no foundation? Oh, no, it was impossible!

"And the idea of thinking you were in a prison," and the lady shook her head while a mournful smile spread over her features.

"But what kind of a place is this, madam?"

"It is a sanatorium, conducted by Professor Muller—one of the most celebrated physicians in the country. I have been under his care for a great number of years, and if I had not been here I should have been dead long ago. This room is for the reception of patients laboring under slight visionary attacks, and whom it is necessary to keep a watch upon until the worst stages of the delirium are over. That is the reason why the windows are guarded by the iron bars, and also why there is a window in the door. It happens to be the only room vacant now, and that is why it was assigned to you."

"It is not your room, then?" Helen asked, her

mind in a maze, not knowing what to make of this explanation.

"Oh, no; mine is on the next floor—much larger than this, and very nicely furnished."

"But this dress that I have on—this costly jewelry, what does it mean—they are not mine."

"Not yours? But they must be, or else you would not wear them."

"But they were put on me when I was in my stupor; I know nothing at all about them."

"This is certainly very strange," and then she took a long look at Helen, shook her head, and said: "My dear, I am afraid the fever still confuses your mind."

Helen knew it was useless to argue with her companion, although convinced that her strange experience was reality and no dream.

"Now, perhaps you would like to know something about me, my dear," the lady continued, "and as you are to be my companion henceforth the desire is only natural."

"If you please, madam."

"My story is quite a long one, romantic and yet very sad. Possibly by looking at my face you can perceive marks there which seem to indicate that my life has not been a happy one."

Helen nodded assent. The signs of carking care were indeed very perceptible in the wan, yet still beautiful face.

"I am French by birth, and my name—well, never mind the name; everybody here knows me as Mrs. Blank. It is so long since I have been called by my own rightful name that I am not sure I should recognize it if it was spoken in my presence. I was an orphan—there were two of us, myself and an elder brother—as noble a man as ever God created. He was some fifteen years older than myself, and ever since the time of the death of our parents protected and supported me. He was absent on business the greater part of the time, and I, lacking a mother's tender care, grew up like an idle weed. In time the tempter came. He was of noble birth, had royal blood in his veins—Come closer to me, child, while I whisper my secret to you," and she drew the wondering girl closer to her bosom. "The man who swore he loved me, and whom I was fool enough to love, was Philip, Duke of Orleans—the eldest son of the Bourbon line, and the rightful king of France. When he told me who he was, I was appalled at the discovery, and tried to make him leave me, but he swore that he loved me better than all the world besides; what were all the titles in the world to him without me? I was a young and foolish girl, barely fifteen; I believed every word he said; I yielded to his entreaties, fled with him to London—without a word to my noble brother—and there I married my prince. Of course we could not have been married in France. Then came a year of wedded bliss—a fool's paradise, though, from which at last I was rudely driven. The prince, my husband, deserted me and his infant daughter, and fled with a newer beauty, who had caught his fickle fancy, to America. I, with my child, followed and traced him out. The other woman he had also deserted after landing on these shores. With the courage that is born of despair, I confronted the man who had wronged me so foully. At first he trembled, and essayed, by means of fair words and smooth promises, to get me to return either to England or France, promising that he would provide sufficient money for the support of myself and child. In uniting himself to me he had been mad, and the marriage could never be publicly acknowledged. I rejected his proposal with scorn. Then his tone changed, and he threatened me. Our union was not a legal one, he said, and, in reality, I had no claim upon him. Some day, when the wheel of fortune turned, he would be king of France, and then he must find a bride among the princesses of Europe worthy of his ancient house. He fled from me, leaving me, as he thought, to beggary and despair, but there are wheels within wheels"—and here the speaker looked around her mysteriously, and lowered her voice to a whisper. "Powerful friends came to my aid. I was placed here in this secure retreat, where it is impossible for my husband's emissaries to reach me. I am his wife and will be Queen of France one of these days when the Bourbons come to their own again. Of course, if my enemies could kill me, they would gladly do so, for there are twenty princesses of the blood who would be proud to wed my lord; but here I am safe."

"And your child, madam?" asked Helen, who had listened to the story with great attention, "is she here with you?"

"Oh, no, my dear," the other replied, with a cunning look. "That would not do at all; she must receive an education befitting a princess of France. She is not here, and where she is I keep a profound secret from every one, for no one suspects she is alive. That is to insure her safety. My enemies are bitter enough to strike even at her young life."

At this point in the conversation footsteps were heard in the entry, and Mrs. Blank, whose hearing seemed to be wonderful; acute, rose to her feet and remarked:

"It is the professor and Madam Mary; breakfast is ready, I presume."

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE LOST HEIR.

In the Plantagenet mansion, in earnest conversation, sat the two cousins, Richard and Viola, and as the words which passed between them have an important bearing on our story we will transcribe them in full.

"I have made a most important discovery, Viola," he said, at the beginning, "and one I think that will turn to our advantage."

"I am glad to hear it. Is it about the will? for Denby laughs at that clumsy trick, as he calls it, and he says outright it is a forgery from beginning to end, and he can easily prove it so if the matter gets into the courts."

"That is something which will admit of considerable discussion," Richard observed. "He must be a wise man indeed nowadays who can tell in advance how a lawsuit will turn out. But, there isn't much doubt, backed by his money, that Livingstone would succeed in making a very long and expensive fight even if he was beaten in the end, while it would undoubtedly be a difficult matter for us to raise money enough to carry on the contest as it ought to be prosecuted."

"Why not take his offer, then?" Viola inquired, after a moment's thought. "I'm sure a hundred thousand dollars is a very handsome sum."

"But not to be compared to a million."

"Very true; but the one you can have for the asking, while it is very uncertain indeed about the other."

"What would you say, Viola, if I told you there was a chance to take all the estate—all of the four or five millions, leaving Denby absolutely penniless?"

"I should say you were joking because it isn't possible."

"But it is."

"How can it be?" Viola exclaimed, in wonder.

"I will admit that there is considerable doubt about this paper purporting to be Mrs. Plantagenet's will—there are suspicious circumstances connected with it which indisputably lead to the belief that it is not a genuine paper, but there is another will in existence."

"Mrs. Plantagenet's?"

"No; a will made by Gloster Plantagenet years ago; and that will of course disposes of Mrs. Plantagenet's claim. She inherited from him in the absence of a will and blood heirs, but as there was a will, she had no business with the property any more than either you or I, and of course could not will away what did not belong to her. Neither could Denby inherit from her. This will, which is properly made and executed, and the witnesses to which are still living, bequeaths all of Gloster Plantagenet's property to his elder daughter."

"Why, I never knew he had one, excepting the infant child that died?"

"This will was made long before that child was born—long before he married Mrs. Livingstone; so, clearly, it has no reference to that daughter at all. It is plain to me that this old will, made years ago, had entirely passed from the memory of our uncle, and when he died I do not believe he was conscious that he had left any such paper behind. It was, probably, stowed away with his old rubbish. After his death it was found by Mrs. Plantagenet, and when she discovered what it was, she yielded to the temptation to suppress the document which robbed both herself and heirs of the vast fortune that Gloster Plantagenet had left. She knew of no daughter—and never heard of such a thing, and it was only natural for her to keep the secret to herself; at the same time she had a suspicion that the daughter lived and fancied she was not far off."

"Richard, you amaze me."

"Why was she so anxious to make a match between you and Denby? You did not care particularly for him, and he fairly hated the idea of making you his wife, but she was determined that the union should take place, even going so far as to threaten to disinherit him if he refused to wed you, and had spoken to her lawyers in regard to making a will wherein she left the bulk of her fortune to you. Why did she act thus strangely?"

"I really cannot tell, but I always was a stupid head and never good at guessing."

"It was a guilty conscience!" Richard declared. "She believed that you were Gloster Plantagenet's daughter. That would explain the fondness which your uncle always displayed for you. She had suppressed the will which had given all the property to you, and was anxious to atone for it by giving the estate to you at her death. If a marriage between yourself and Denby could be arranged, all well and good, but if he was obstinate she was determined you should have the greater part of your father's wealth."

"But I don't understand! How can it be possible that I am Gloster Plantagenet's child?"

"Your supposed father was his elder brother, as mine was his younger."

"Yes."

"But you never knew either your father, or mother, or any relatives of your mother. You were left an orphan at a tender age, and Gloster

always took care of you. Both your parents died abroad, so it was said, but no one knew much about it. Now the truth I believe to be that your supposed father was never married. At any rate, I never heard my father speak of his wife; he never saw or knew of her, and all that he ever heard of his brother's death was when Gloster returned from some foreign country bringing you with him, then about three years old, and told the story of the death of your parents. Boy though I was at the time, I remember distinctly that my father did not believe in the story that you were brother Jack's child, and said that it was far more likely you were Gloster's chick. And then when my uncle departed to America right after that, I recollect my father said it was on account of some girl whom he had married and deserted, and that he fled to avoid the vengeance of some relative. Now the whole matter is clear to me: the woman he married and afterward deserted—for Gloster Plantagenet was at heart a scamp, despite all his great success in money-getting—was your mother. For some reason he stole you away from her, and then, when hotly pursued, fled to America, leaving you behind in England, masquerading as his niece. His wife pursued him here, and he compromised with her in some way, promising to make the child his heir, and then the will was drawn out. He was a man of considerable property even then. I gathered these facts from some old letters, nearly destroyed by the ravages of time, which I found among the rubbish of one of his old desks stored in the lumber room up stairs."

"You have fairly taken my breath away. It does not seem possible, and yet the story you have put together seems a very probable one."

The girl spoke rather doubtfully. She knew Richard to be a cunning fellow, and had a suspicion that he would not be inclined to be scrupulous when there was such a prize as four or five millions of dollars to be had if the cards in the game were rightly played.

"First, rest assured there isn't the least doubt that the will is genuine. It came into my hands in a peculiar way. Of course I have a suspicion of how it was obtained, but I wanted the document too much to push inquiries into the matter. A certain party came to see me and said the country was getting too hot to hold him. For five hundred dollars he would put me on the track of this will. I closed the bargain. The document was in this same old desk in the lumber room up stairs; there I found it, and of course I am not obliged to tell that any one suggested the search. That is the first point. The will is genuine. And can I prove that you are Gloster Plantagenet's eldest daughter? That's the second point. If I can, no power on earth can keep you out of the property. The proofs are in England, and in my mind there is not the slightest doubt that I can make out a case, and if a link or two in the chain is missing a shrewd lawyer will easily supply others that will do."

"You're a darling fellow, and if you give me all this money I shall love you ever so much!"

And so they plotted and planned to fight the battle for Gloster Plantagenet's gold.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AN ASTOUNDING STATEMENT.

THE lady's guess was correct; it was the professor and his principal female assistant, known as Madam Mary.

The professor was a portly man of forty-five or thereabouts, with a smoothly-shaven face, quite fat and ornamented with a double chin. A sort of oily expression to his countenance, a peculiar way of sucking in his lips and rolling up his little cunning eyes strongly suggested the Aminadab Sleek order of men—fellows loud in good words, profuse in their protestations, but not at all to be depended upon, but yet the very sort of persons who, in nine cases out of ten, will succeed in posing successfully before the world as the benefactors of their kind.

Another Canary, in fact, only of a higher grade.

Helen, grown wise by experience, distrusted the man the moment she looked at him.

The woman was a tall, stout specimen of humanity, with a stolid face and an iron-like jaw—a woman who could be depended upon to execute all orders given her by those who paid for her services, without remorse or scruple.

"The morning repast is ready, Mrs. Blank," the man said, with a bow to her, and a similar salutation to the girl, "and if you will have the kindness to walk down to the refectory while I exchange a few words with our dear young friend here, you will oblige me."

Helen recognized the voice at once. This was the man who had spoken to her on the country road just before the time of the assault and inquired if she was Miss—somebody; the name had escaped from the girl's memory.

Mrs. Blank bowed gracefully, smiled at the girl, and with the woman quitted the apartment.

The professor, who, despite his size and weight, had a stealthy, soft, cat-like tread, followed them to the door, saw that it was securely closed after them, listened until he

heard the door at the entry shut after them, then, rubbing his hands softly together, he returned to where Helen stood, gazing at him in amazement.

"Sit down, my dear," he said, his tones as soft and bland as the purring of a pleased cat. He waved his hand toward the bed as he spoke. "You must excuse the furniture of this apartment," he continued; "it is not as sumptuous as your own, I know, but after your little escapade of yesterday I thought better to put you in here for the present."

Helen was astounded. The man spoke in such a familiar tone, just as if he knew all about her. Was it possible he was a confederate of the senator, and that in fleeing from Bumblebig's house she had jumped from the frying-pan into the fire?

She knew not what to say, and so mechanically sunk upon the edge of the bed.

The professor seated himself upon the other bed, facing the girl, and surveyed her for a few moments in silence, as though thinking of what to say.

"My dear child," he began, at last, "I do not suppose in your unhappy mental condition that it is possible to make you comprehend how much trouble and anxiety you have given me during the last twenty-four hours. I assure you I have not had a moment's peace from the time I discovered that you were missing until I encountered you in such a totally unexpected manner. I will own to you, my child, that you were cunning enough to almost deceive me, and I am a man who has had a great deal of experience in this life, and I think I have profited by it. When I discovered your clothes on the bank of the river, I felt sure that, in your madness, you had flung yourself into the stream, and so put an end to your existence, but in the soft sand leading to the rock whereon the clothes were placed, I found that your footsteps not only led to the rock but away from it again—a sure proof that you had not thrown yourself into the water. Then the idea flashed upon me that, after escaping from this mansion, and when you had made your way to the river, resolved to put an end to your life, you there chanced upon the clothes of some poor, misguided girl, doubtless, who had chosen to find an end to her woes in the dark current of the noble Hudson. An idea seized upon you—a fantasy due to your disordered brain—that you could disguise yourself in these cast-off clothes, leave your own garments upon the bank of the river, and so deceive everybody into the belief that you had committed suicide, while you wandered away, fearless of pursuit. Luckily, thanks to the footprints in the sand, I guessed your plan, and so followed you up closely, and at last succeeded in overtaking you."

Helen listened with a face expressive of the greatest amazement, but she began to comprehend now; there was a mistake; the man knew nothing about her at all, but by some unexplained circumstance had taken her for somebody else; and now that she understood this, an intense feeling of relief came over her. The danger was past. All she had to do was to make the gentleman understand the mistake under which he labored, and she would be free to depart. She did not imagine that this would be a difficult matter, although he seemed so positive in his recognition.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I think you are laboring under a mistake," she said, in reply.

"A mistake—in regard to what?"

"I do not think you know me; you have mistaken me for some one else."

"My child, that isn't possible!"

"I am sure I do not know you, and I have never been in this house before."

"Now, you see, my dear, that is one of the strange hallucinations which, at times, takes possession of you, and which renders my task of taking care of you anything but agreeable," he replied, shaking his head gravely. "Of course no one to look at you would believe it was not the truth, and that is the principal reason why your malady is so hard to cope with, trying my utmost skill."

Helen was visibly annoyed; the persistence of the man was provoking. Her words did not seem to make the least impression upon him.

"But you are wrong, sir, I assure you!" she declared. "It is no hallucination; you speak of me as one whom you have known, while I am sure I never saw you before in my life!"

"Shall I introduce myself, then, and humor you in your whim?" the other asked, apparently not in the least disturbed.

"If you please, for the quicker we understand each other the quicker I shall be free to depart."

"Ah, you ought not to be anxious to run away, for I am sure you have been well treated ever since you have been under my care, but since it is your whim to appear ignorant, know, then, that I am Professor Muller, and this is my house, the Ingleside Sanitarium, devoted entirely to the care and cure of mental diseases in the female sex—an establishment patronized by the best people in the country, for it is conducted on strictly scientific plans, and although we do not make many cures, I admit—because nearly all our patients are incurable, and all the

Doctors and drugs in this world cannot 'medicine to a mind diseased'—yet the care and attention which the inmates receive cannot be surpassed at any mad-house in the country."

"A mad-house!" cried Helen, in horror.

"Yes, my dear—a private lunatic asylum, in fact, but sanitarium sounds much better, and all our patients are members of prominent and wealthy families, for the charges here are high, and none but wealthy people could afford to pay them. Take your father, the judge, for instance; if he were not a millionaire, he couldn't afford to pay fifty dollars a week for your board."

"My father, the judge?" gasped the girl, amazed.

"Yes, of course."

"Why, who do you think I am?"

"Miss Pauline Cadwalader, of course, only daughter of Judge Cadwalader of Ohio, now minister to Russia."

"Oh, but you are crazy, sir, as well as your patients, to assert such a thing! I am not Miss Cadwalader, and never even knew that there was any such person in existence. My name is Helen Home, and I am a poor girl, without a relative, and hardly a friend in the world!"

The mad-doctor shook his head and assumed a mournful air.

"You see, my dear, that is where your insanity comes in. You are in full possession of your senses except in regard to this one thing. First you imagine you are the Queen of England; then the next week, you are an African princess; from that you turn into the greatest prima donna the world has ever known; but this freak of assuming to be a poor girl is really something out of the common, for hitherto you have imagined yourself to be some great personage."

For a moment Helen looked at the professor like one dazed; his confident tone stunned her.

"Can you not see that I am not the girl you take me to be?" she cried, at last, in a sudden outburst of passion. "Or, is it possible that you do not want to see? I tell you that I am Helen Home, and I demand that I be permitted to depart instantly."

"And that poor old lady who has just left, Mrs. Blank, declares she is married to one of the Bourbon princes, and would be mortally offended if we failed to treat her in a manner becoming the future Queen of France, except at odd times when she imagines she is the Empress of Russia and is afraid of being assassinated."

"And is she mad?" cried Helen, horror-stricken, for she had never dreamed of such a thing.

"As crazy as it is possible for a woman to be. She is the wife of a deceased merchant, and she has been under my care for fifteen or sixteen years now."

"Oh, but I am not mad; I am Helen Home, and you must not detain me!" the girl cried, wrought up almost to frenzy at the terrible situation in which she found herself.

"Now, you are becoming violent, and if you keep on I must use harsh measures. It is the hand of iron in the velvet glove here. As long as you behave yourself and conform to my rules, you will be treated in the kindest possible manner; have plenty of good clothes to wear, plenty of the very best to eat and drink, plenty of books and amusements to kill time, and you can sew and busy yourself with any kind of fancy-work, take exercise in the garden, and if you are very contented and disposed to remain here and help me a little in taking care of the rest, you shall receive a liberal salary, such as the girl, Helen Home, whom you assume to be, would no doubt be glad to get. If, on the contrary, you are obstinate and ugly, there come the strait-jackets, the dark underground cells and the powerful drugs which act upon both body and mind, so that the sanest person under their influence will appear to be nothing more than a gibbering idiot."

"Oh, heavens! into what a den have I fallen!" exclaimed Helen, in terror, recoiling from the man who was now throwing off the mask and appearing in his own true character.

"No den at all, if you are sensible enough to know what is good for you," he replied. "Now we will suppose a case. Miss Cadwalader is here in my charge and she is worth fifty dollars a week to me, the cash ready the moment the bill is presented; the judge, her father, and the only relative who comes anywhere near her, is in Russia, and, probably, will not return under three or four years; the girl, through some stupidity, manages to escape. I follow in chase, and find her clothes a few miles off on the bank of a river, and as her mania is of a suicidal nature, the chances are great that she has improved the opportunity to take her own life, and I am out fifty dollars a week, for the risk would be too great to present the bills without having some one in the establishment to personate the girl. Then, returning home in the darkness, I overhear a conversation between an old woman and a young one. The voice of the young one attracts my attention, for it is exactly like the voice of the missing girl. I catch sight of her face, and I find that in feature, too, she is almost an exact counterpart of my patient."

I gather from the conversation between the two women that the girl has a record which won't bear inspection, and even now she is flying from pursuit, and is without friends. Then the brilliant idea occurs to me to seize and carry her off on purpose to have her personate the dead girl so I can secure my handsome little sum per year, thinking, too, in her peculiar situation, that, when she comes to understand the circumstances, she will be extremely glad to stay in my domain and to evade the pursuit so hot upon her heels."

"I would not consent to be a party to such an infamous scheme for anything in this world!" the girl protested, hot with scorn and burning with rage at the insult of such an offer.

"If you get violent, Miss Cadwalader, I really shall have to use unpleasant measures," the professor remarked. "And if you persist in this delusion that you are somebody else, I shall have to try some powerful drugs upon you. If you think it over perhaps you will calm down. I'll come again in an hour or two."

And with this assurance the proprietor of this remarkable establishment departed.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A CLEW AT LAST.

AFTER ascertaining all the particulars in regard to the finding of the garments, and thanking the officer and patrolman for their kindness, Denby and the lawyer proceeded down-town again.

"There does not seem to be the least clew," the anxious lawyer remarked, discouraged at the ill-success of his search.

"It does not appear to me probable, though, that the girl has destroyed herself," the lawyer declared.

"Oh, no; I do not entertain that thought; she was of a bright, joyous nature, and I am sure it would take a crushing weight of sorrow to bring her to the point of wantonly taking her own life."

"Wouldn't it be a good idea to employ a sharp detective to look into the matter?"

"Perhaps it would; there is this Muttelbud, but I haven't a very good opinion of him."

"Oh, I don't take any stock in Muttelbud at all. As far as I can see he has blundered from beginning to end in this matter. Brag and bluster are his best 'holts.' I haven't the least doubt that he is responsible for the girl quitting her home down in the country. He went down there and bragged of what he was going to do, and instead of securing the girl, as was his intention, he so frightened her that she thought some awful danger menaced her and so cut her lucky at once."

"Speaking of Muttelbud reminds me of the Englishman, Garrowcroft, his employer, who, for some purpose of his own, is so anxious to find Helen. Wouldn't it be a good idea to make known to him what we have discovered in regard to these clothes, and the supposition abroad that she has committed suicide?"

"An excellent idea! He's a shrewd man of the world and in a multitude of counselors there is safety."

"We will go to him immediately."

As it happened the Englishman was at home when the two arrived, and so they were enabled to lay the matter before him.

He too scouted the idea of suicide.

"The poor child has been foully dealt with, you may rest assured of that!" he instantly exclaimed. "In escaping from the house of that miserable old wretch, Bumblebig, she fell into the clutches of some other scoundrel or scoundrels, and for some reason—which I confess I can't fathom—it was desired that it should be believed the girl had committed suicide. There is some deep plot in this matter, gentlemen, you can be certain of that, and the quicker it is investigated the better."

"That is the conclusion of both Mr. Purchase and myself, and we thought of putting detectives on the track at once."

Garrowcroft shook his head.

"Really, gentlemen, you must excuse me if I say to you that I have little confidence in detectives. I am satisfied that this Muttelbud, whom I employed, has blundered—if not from the very beginning—at critical moments, and by so doing has upset everything. Muttelbud would be the appropriate name for him, in my opinion. Suppose, gentlemen, instead of employing detectives, that we try our hands at a little detective work. Let us go up to the spot where the clothes were discovered; examine the locality and question anybody whom we may chance to find in the neighborhood. If I understand you rightly you didn't investigate the matter very closely."

Both admitted that they had not.

"It is clear to me the clothes were put near the river to give the impression that the girl had jumped into the water; I am satisfied she did not put them there herself, and so somebody else must have done so, and as it is plain the garments could only be obtained from the girl, the inference is that, if we find the party who left the clothes we shall obtain a direct clew to the lost Helen."

Both Denby and his lawyer assented to this view of the case, and the result was that an

hour later found the three on the spot where the clothes had been found.

But, after a careful examination of the locality, all were obliged to confess themselves baffled.

"The next thing is to question the inhabitants," Garrowcroft remarked.

There was a small shanty about an eighth of a mile down the river which the three had noticed as they came up, and at this humble abode the Englishman suggested the investigation had better begin.

As they approached the house they noticed a sharp-looking youngster about ten or twelve years old fishing from a rock a little ways from the shanty.

"I'll commence operations with him," Garrowcroft said, as they approached.

The Englishman got at the subject in a masterly manner. He had resolved to interrogate the boy upon two subjects: first, had he noticed any strangers, male or female, in the neighborhood lately; second, were there any folks of bad reputation in the vicinity?

The opening move was to exhibit to the wondering eyes of the boy a bright new dollar, and assure him that the coin should be his if he would answer truthfully the questions put to him.

The lad agreed readily enough, for silver dollars were uncommon scarce in that neighborhood.

In answer to the first question the boy said he had not seen any strangers about for two or three days, and as he explained that he spent about all his time from six in the morning to nine or ten in the evening outdoors, it was more than probable he would have noticed any strangers if there had been any around. To the second, the people in the neighborhood were all pretty good as far as he knew. And then a sudden thought occurred to the lad:

"Praps you mean the mad-house up on the hill?"

No, Garrowcroft said that he didn't take any interest in mad-houses.

"Tain't a very big one—a private one where the people hav' to pay big to git in—a sanny-something, the professor calls it," the boy explained. "He's a mean old cuss, that Muller! I came near pegging a stone at him yesterday night when I see'd him going up the track with a bundle."

The three men were fairly trembling with excitement at this unexpected disclosure, and it was a moment before Garrowcroft could go on with his questioning.

"Mr. Muller had a bundle and went up the track?"

"He did, the mean old rip; hosswhipped me one't 'cos I was in his orchard, and he said I was a-hooking his apples."

"Where do you suppose he was going?"

"I dunno; but if I had 'a' thought he was a-coming back so soon, I would have hid in the bushes somewhere and fired a rock at him, anyhow."

"Did he have the bundle when he came back?"

The boy scratched his head a moment.

"I guess he didn't; I don't remember seeing of it."

"It doesn't matter, anyway; here's your dollar, sonny, for your trouble."

Away the three went. There wasn't much doubt in their minds, now, as to where the girl was confined, though the object of such an outrage was inexplicable.

Now Purchase's legal knowledge came in play.

"We want to go to the nearest magistrate and swear out a warrant; then, with an officer, proceed to search the house."

Not a minute was wasted. The magistrate was found, the warrant issued, an officer procured, and then Professor Muller's Sanitarium was attacked.

Never was there a more astonished man than the proprietor of the private mad-house when his premises were invaded by this "army."

First he attempted to bluster, but when he found that the visitors were armed with the necessary legal authority, and were determined to execute their purpose, he began to cringe. He had been away a great deal, lately; one of his patients had escaped in his absence, and his men had recaptured her, so they said, but he had not seen the patient since his return, and there might have been some mistake made. And in this way he tried to avert his own implication in the outrage.

He conducted the visitors to the cell-like apartment where Mrs. Blank and the lost Helen were confined.

With a scream of joy Helen rushed toward Denby the moment she saw him in the doorway. And her exclamation was echoed by the poor insane patient, Mrs. Blank, when she looked upon Garrowcroft.

"Mathew, Mathew!" she cried.

"Oh, heavens, it is my sister!" the Englishman exclaimed, rushing to her.

With a wild scream she threw up her arms and fainted dead away, Garrowcroft catching her as she fell, and placing her upon one bed.

"You have done it now," the professor remarked, cynically. "You have either killed or cured her. Her madness came from a severe grief-shock, and now if she don't die from the effects of too much happiness, it is more than probable she will actually recover her reason."

"And I have mourned her for dead all these years," the Englishman moaned.

"Poor lady! and I love her so much, although we have only just become acquainted, and she says that I am nearer and dearer to her than any one she has ever known," Helen remarked, her face full of sympathy.

"And no wonder, my dear child, for this woman is your own mother, as I am your own uncle!"

"My mother!" and throwing herself upon her knees beside the bed, she rested her head upon the bosom of the senseless woman and burst into a flood of tears.

"Yes, your mother, who was stolen from me by a villain when she was but a mere child; he married her; then, after you were born, deserted her and fled to this country. She, with her child, followed him, and all traces of her disappeared. I was away in India, battling hard for a fortune, and knew nothing but the bare facts of the case. Not until I returned to England with a fortune, only a year ago, did I learn all the particulars. Then I came to America, but all I could learn was that my sister had died shortly after coming to this country, and that her child had been intrusted to a man living somewhere near Long Branch, whose exact name I could not discover. I came for vengeance; too late, though—the villain who did all this mischief was dead. But a bitter reckoning hereafter awaits Gloster Plantagenet!"

A cry of astonishment came from Denby's lips.

"Gloster Plantagenet was my step-father!"

"The scoundrel! and he couldn't legally marry anybody as long as this poor woman lived, for she was his lawful wife. I understand it all now; when my poor sister came here and hunted down the man who had so cruelly deserted her, he, probably, threw off the mask and declared she had no claim on him, and that she could go and starve for all he cared. So the terrible shock produced insanity."

"Exactly," the professor hastened to exclaim. "That is the way she tells it, with the slight exception that, in her madness, it is the French prince, the Duke of Orleans, whom she had married. I can be of assistance to you, gentlemen, if you care to accept my aid. If you will agree to overlook this little mistake that has been made, I will furnish you with the name of the lawyer who arranged for this lady's keeping here. Of course I never knew who she was, or anything about her. In an institution of this kind, troublesome questions are never asked of patrons. I knew that there had been a sum of money set apart, the interest of which was sufficient to support her, so that she was provided for as long as she lived. I gather from what you have said, that there may be some property involved in this matter, and my evidence, and the proof of which I can put you on the track, will help to make the legal chain complete."

After a consultation, it was agreed to accept the offer, although, as Garrowcroft remarked, "the rascal ought to be punished!"

"I am punished where I feel it most, gentlemen—in my pocket," Muller replied. "By this little incident I lose two good paying boarders—seventy-five dollars a week out, and if I don't get some others in their places right soon I shall have to shut up shop."

Meanwhile the unfortunate victim of man's cruelty was slowly reviving, and as her strength came back so that she could sit up, all noticed that the peculiar wild expression which her face had worn was no longer there.

"She's all right, gentlemen; it is a marvelous recovery," Muller remarked. "All the medicine in the world applied for a hundred years couldn't have done it. I'm no slouch of an expert, gentlemen, and I know what I'm talking about, if I do run a rather peculiar establishment."

And it was the truth, the shock and rescue had restored the unhappy woman to all her senses.

At one turn of fortune's wheel, Helen recovered her freedom, the man she adored, and the loving mother whom she had so long mourned as dead.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A ROGUE'S DISCOMFITURE.

THE rest of our tale is now soon told.

The unexpected appearance of the first wife and eldest daughter of Gloster Plantagenet would have upset all of the crafty Richard's plans, even if a bomb-shell had not exploded under him, hurled from an entirely different direction.

He had made all preparations to produce the true will which, in some moment when Justice got the better of his craft, Gloster Plantagenet had executed, making tardy reparation to his abandoned daughter; but it was not the young

rogue's game to make the will public until he had gone to England and arranged matters there, so that he could, by means of false witnesses and false oaths, establish the fact that Viola, instead of being Gloster's niece, was in truth his daughter. He felt sure that, by the liberal use of money, he could make out a case so strong that he could make Denby glad to compromise by giving up one-half of the property, even if he could not clutch the whole.

But, just as he was getting everything nicely in trim an event occurred that changed all his plans.

As the reader will probably remember, the superintendent of police surmised that the coachman, who had been so prompt to accuse Livingstone of the murder of his mother, knew a great deal more about that tragedy than he was willing to acknowledge, and so the detective, after his release from the House of Detention, kept a constant watch upon him, day and night. So complete was this surveillance that the man never stepped foot out of his house without being dogged by a spy.

Suspecting that he was shadowed—for the guilty mind doth fear each bush an officer—the man at last discovered the truth. Then he became alarmed and sought an interview with Richard, informed him that the police were on his track, and that he must have money by means of which to fly.

The plotter, although at first rather inclined to laugh at these fears, finally came to the conclusion that it would be a good idea to get rid of the weak-kneed scoundrel, for by this time he began to realize that the trap he had laid to catch Denby was not going to work. He had hoped that the circumstantial evidence was strong enough to convict Livingstone of the murder of his mother—for it was he who had concocted the charge—but now he was convinced nothing could be expected from that effort.

So, on the whole, he thought it would be a good idea to get the coachman away, for he now distrusted the coward, and had an idea that should he be arrested, the man would try to throw all the blame on his employer.

Giving him a hundred dollars—at which the other grumbled, for he thought he ought to have five—he advised him to "get out" without delay. The fellow declared that he would leave by the first train; but in regard to this he reckoned "without his host," for the detectives, keen on the watch, nabbed him at the depot.

The superintendent, resolving to play a bold game, had given orders to arrest the coachman if he attempted flight. His idea was to frighten a confession out of the man, if he really knew anything about the murder.

This artifice succeeded. The moment the fellow found himself in the hands of the officers, and it was intimated to him that he was suspected of being the murderer of Mrs. Plantagenet, he became terribly alarmed and agreed to tell all he knew about the affair. It wasn't much, but it served to throw suspicion strongly upon Richard Plantagenet.

Then the chief resolved upon a master-stroke, and that was to arrest Richard on the charge of murder, hoping by the movement to frighten him into a confession.

But the plotter was too much of a fox to be caught napping. The coachman, having told him by what train he intended going, the young man had been on hand in the background, disguised, to see him off. When the arrest was made, in the fright of the moment, the coachman had declared his own innocence, but acknowledged that he knew who did the deed. Richard waited to hear no more. He realized well enough that the time to act promptly had come, and if he was not anxious to see the inside of a cell, the quicker he got out of the way the better, for he was the guilty man, although he had not the slightest intention of injuring Mrs. Plantagenet when he had made the midnight raid upon the safe.

In anticipation of just such an event as this he had made all preparations for flight. He had fared well since coming to America, and flattered himself he had such a start that in some infant city of the far West he might build up a colossal fortune.

"After all, I was a fool not to take the hundred thousand," he said, after he had got past St. Louis and felt free from danger.

But in the wild West Richard Plantagenet was not fated to prosper. The weight of the crime which he had committed seemed to drag him down. All his speculations were unlucky, and finally reduced to poverty, he caught the fever so fatal to non-acclimated strangers in some parts of the mountain regions, and died a miserable death without even a friendly hand to close his eyes; and thus it happened that the true will of Gloster Plantagenet had never come to light, for Richard had carried it away with him in his flight.

By means of the information gained from the old scamp, Muller, the lawyers were found through whom old Plantagenet had arranged in regard to his wife and daughter, but with the cunning natural to the man, he had not let the firm know his real name.

It was very easy, though, to identify "Mr. Thomas Blank," as he had called himself, and the great speculator.

As the professor had predicted, the long-afflicted woman completely recovered her reason, and bid fair to enjoy many happy days in the society of her new-found daughter.

The charge against Denby was of course utterly exploded by the confession of the coachman, who swore he had been bribed by the fugitive, Richard, to make the charge, and as a punishment for his perjury he was sent up the river to do the State some service.

Justice, too, at last swooped down on Bumblebig. It was suddenly discovered that he had been dipping his arms in the public treasury up to the elbows, and when his "crookedness" came out, and he only escaped punishment by a hasty flight to parts unknown, leaving all his ill-gotten gains behind him, again the newspapers displayed the stirring head-line: "Another eminent citizen gone wrong!"

The Canary family, cunning and skillful as they were, "tried it on" once too often, and were "scooped in," then sent to Sing Sing to meditate upon the folly of all evil ways.

As for Viola, the girl without a heart, although well provided for by Denby, she hungered after more money, married an Italian count, who turned out to be a chorus-singer in the opera, a mean rascal, who made sad havoc with his wife's money until Livingstone interfered, and procured a legal separation for the unfortunate girl; and now, as the poorly-paid music-teacher in a fashionable boarding-school, she sighs for "what might have been."

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